

THE MYSTERIOUS OCCULT WORLD OF THE WORLD'S MOST SECRET PEOPLE

Talismans and jewels—what they are
and how they work

Healing, mind reading and the Look

Sexual rituals, spells, aphrodisiacs

Gypsy seers and dream interpretations

Secret names and symbols

Gypsy road signs—what they are and
how to read them

Magical flora and fauna

Charms, fetishes, icons, chants,
spells, masks...more!

A vivid, gripping, authentic portrait of
the Romany world by a man
who became an "accepted one"...
a man whose own psychic
powers caused him to be entrusted
with the mission to make known to
the world the real customs, morals and...

SECRETS OF THE GYPSIES

Cover printed in U.S.A.

CHARMS OF LOVE, SPELLS OF HATE—
THE STRANGE AND PRIVATE POWERS OF THE ROMANY REVEALED
BY A MAN INITIATED INTO THEIR MYSTERIES...

SECRETS OF THE GYPSIES

PIERRE
DERLON

BB
Ballantine
Nonfiction
25405
\$1.75

WITH 16 PAGES
OF PHOTOS

"A man who refuses to dream, refuses life itself," Sandra said. "And you, if you so wish, can live in the space of an hour what life will take twenty years to bring you. Do you want to? Very few men of your race have ever been given the opportunity to live the life that will be opened to you. If you accept, from this moment you will never be unloved."

I accepted. Then the everyday world seemed to slip away.

"I exist already somewhere else," she said. "I am a little girl whom you will only recognize the day you find me. She is my other self, and her power over you will be the same as mine. . . ."

At the time those words were incomprehensible to me. But sixteen years later I met a girl who looked as Sandra did then—and she became my wife. . . .

SECRETS OF THE GYPSIES

SECRETS
OF
THE GYPSIES

Pierre Derlon

BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

*To the mother of the tribe,
Carmen Rodriguez,
for that which links us both to life, to death*

English translation copyright © 1977 by Random House, Inc.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Published in the United States by Ballantine Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, and simultaneously in Canada by Ballantine Books of Canada, Ltd., Toronto, Canada. Originally published in France as *Traditions occultes des gitanes* by Editions Robert Laffont. Copyright © 1975 by Editions Robert Laffont, S.A.

Translated from the French by Joan Smyth

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 76-56353

ISBN 0-345-25405-8-175

This edition published by arrangement with
Editions Robert Laffont

Manufactured in the United States of America

First Ballantine Books Edition: May 1977

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>I Introduction to the Sorcerers</i>	1
1 Everything Has a Beginning	2
2 The Marked Men	15
<i>II The Occult Powers</i>	21
3 The Look	22
4 Mind Reading	34
5 The Experiment in the Cornfield	47
6 Sleep and Dreams	50
7 Facial Characteristics and the Lines of the Hand	55
8 The Fire Masters	59
9 Magnetism	75
10 Vision in Movement	84
<i>III The Magical Universe</i>	101
11 Fauna and Flora of the Gypsies	102
12 The Secret of the Claws	112
13 Talismans and Jewels	116
14 The Icon Shelf	123
15 The Masks of Serenity	127
<i>IV Love and Sexuality</i>	131
16 Women and Sex	132
17 The Jars of Harmony	145
18 The Fiancées of the Shadows	150
19 The Occult Couple	156

V	<i>Secret Signs and Words</i>	163
20	The Language of Hands	164
21	The Calendar and the Notion of Time	169
22	Road Signs	181
VI	<i>Laws and Beliefs</i>	193
23	The Walking Dead	194
24	Chartres and the Gypsies	208
25	Sara the Kali	217
26	The Ancient Rites	223

PREFACE

Gypsies are dying out. Modern civilization, intolerant of everything deviating from its own image, has condemned them to extinction. The list of covert or flagrant persecutions, official harassments, and racial discrimination is never ending. Bureaucracy, the police state, national fanaticism, and a narrow shopkeeping mentality are getting the better of the last of the "free men." There was a time when the only things that mattered to the Gypsy were his own integrity, his tribe, the few square feet of earth on which he slept, and the roof of starlit sky which covered him. He had a harsh awakening.

Already at the beginning of the twentieth century much of the Gypsies' oral tradition had started to die out. The ancestral heritage was gradually stifled under the pressure of the "gorgios," the non-Gypsies. Politics, automobiles, and television did the rest. Today the once large Gypsy *kumpanias*, or hordes, are reduced to a few families camped out miserably on the outskirts of towns or in their even dingier suburbs. Many nomads now lead sedentary lives. Gas and motor oil have replaced oats and hay. The big American car pulling an ultramodern trailer has replaced the horse-drawn high-wheeled caravan. The few of these still to be found in the possession of poorer families will soon be museum pieces. Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, the Mecca of the Gypsies, has been transformed into a folklore center for tourists. The old-time keepers of Gypsy culture, the sorcerers or *kakos*—the wise-men—are dying out silently, taking with them their secrets. There are no longer eager young ears waiting to receive their wisdom. The world of the gorgios has swallowed the new generation. Soon, there will be no more sources to draw upon.

All this was in the forefront of my mind as I wrote this book, which owes its existence to a remarkable personal experience. Thirty years ago, a *kako* whose life I had saved discovered I possessed abnormal psychic powers, most of them still in a latent state. He adopted me as a son and confidant. I became an "accepted one" and lived on intimate terms with the Romanies. The few remaining *kakos* initiated me by degrees into the occult world of the Gypsies. Because they felt they had no spiritual heirs, they turned over to me the secrets of their ancient lore. Knowing themselves condemned, these patriarchs, who were for the most part illiterate, used the gorgio who knew how to read and write as their spokesman. I became one of the last links in their chain, entrusted with a mission to make known to the world what had been the real occult mysteries of their "journey."

In my first book, *Ainsi Vivait le Tzigane* ("This Is How Gypsies Lived") I gave a picture of the customs, the morals, and some of the legends of the Gypsies. I feel that this present book constitutes a unique document, because it lifts the veil that has covered certain techniques of casting spells, witchcraft, and hypnotism, which have always been closely guarded secrets. Not one of the thousands of studies of Gypsy lore has dealt with these secrets for the very good reason that no gorgio has ever had direct access to them.

In the course of the following chapters the reader will discover an irrational and sometimes rather frightening world, but a very real one nevertheless. The majority of the phenomena described are not necessarily exclusively Romany, because in a slightly different form the same basic principles can be found in the religions of the American Indians and the Mongolian races. A comparative study would reveal many striking resemblances, but this is a task I leave to the ethnologists.

I want to make it clear at the outset that my text can only give a fragmentary picture of the occult traditions, as I have only been able to draw on my per-

sonal encounters with a few sorcerers, as well as exchanges I have had in my capacity as a healer with a number of itinerant families. The following pages do not pretend to exhaust the subject. There are many secret practices that have not been revealed to me. Also, at the request of my "fellow Travelers," I have imposed on myself a certain censorship. The reader will have to forgive me certain voluntary gaps, motivated either by simple respect for ancestral traditions or for reasons of safety. Those who know something of the daily humiliations and persecutions of my brother Gypsies will understand why.

As a result I have mainly limited my choice to the practices, cults, and secret signs still used in the first half of this century, but now forgotten by the majority of the "traveling people." However, the unpublished balance of all the information I have gathered over three decades will be left to the Musée de l'Homme in Paris for public release fifty years after my death—when the last nomads will have disappeared.

This is the will of my fathers.

I

Introduction
to
The Sorcerers

ONE

 EVERYTHING HAS A
BEGINNING

End of a letter once received . . .

*Luck will smile on you
one day in life, Pierre,
She'll call to you
from among the voices of the crowd
and you must be able to recognize her,
for her voice will be that of a
despairing outcast.*

Pierre Langlois
former editor of *Paris-Soir*,
1942

Everything has a beginning . . .

I became enveloped in the magic mantle of the Gypsy world exactly four days before war was declared in September 1939. Since then it has never left me, and I have never been able to get away from the way of life which became mine the day when, bent over the handlebars of my bicycle, I left the town of Patay in the Eure-et-Loir to return to my parents' home at Janville, twenty miles away. The road was a familiar one; I had traveled it so often every twist and turn was known to me. The sky was overcast and night was approaching; it was the hour when furtive wild creatures put their noses outside their burrows.

A strong oncoming wind made the going difficult as

I pedaled against it with lowered head. Suddenly I saw a dark form in the ditch by the roadside. So intent was I on the effort of forcing my bicycle forward that at first my mind only registered the image, but two hundred yards farther on I turned back to see what it was that had caught my attention. Getting off my bicycle, I saw that the dark mass was a man drowning in a deep ditch of water. I hurried to his assistance and managed to pull him out. He was dressed only in dark brown corduroy trousers and a velvet jacket pulled around his bare chest. As he began to get his breath back he gestured repeatedly in the direction of the road. I couldn't understand what he wanted to tell me. Dusk was falling, and there was nothing to be seen but the outlines of haystacks against the steel-gray sky.

I was nineteen years old, living through a time heavy with anxiety, alone in the gathering dark with a man I had saved from death, who kept murmuring a phrase of which I could make no sense:

"Walk to the convoy! Walk to the convoy!"

Pulling himself up to the top of the bank, he noticed the handlebars of my bicycle, and trying to smile, he took my arm and said, "The Gypsy convoy . . . farther on . . ."

At last I understood him, and I leaped onto my bicycle, having first propped him up in a hollow in the bank. Fighting the wind, I pedaled and pedaled, my hands clenched on the handlebars, my leg muscles taut. The empty road ahead seemed never-ending. Finally I saw a wavering light dangling from the back of a caravan.

I'd made it. I overtook the slowly moving trailer and spoke to a man walking beside a plodding horse on whose back was a dog half asleep. It was a strange scene. In front of me five other caravans moved to the rhythm of the leading horse, a broad-shouldered draft horse which appeared of giant size compared with the small piebalds pulling the other vehicles.

"A man has nearly drowned in the ditch back there, and he wants your help," I shouted.

A few minutes later, the waiting line of caravans watched my departure escorted by the man to whom I had spoken, who was mounted bareback on his horse and yelling at me, "Quicker, quicker, you lazy bastard." He never stopped swearing at me throughout the ride back, which seemed even longer than before. At last we arrived. The man I had left gasping for breath was now smoking a short pipe, and it was hard to believe that half an hour earlier and only a few feet away he had almost drowned.

I can remember today the cry of the Gypsy who accompanied me when he recognized his companion.

"Hartiss!"

He repeated the name over and over again while the other man got to his feet with difficulty, hanging on to us to climb over the bank. His eyes appeared glazed, and in the dim light cast by my bicycle lamp he seemed to give me an unearthly stare.

"You are called Pierre," said the unknown man, "and I have been waiting for you for a long time, because you are part of my destiny."

He smiled and pulled on his pipe with short hard breaths. It wasn't until long afterward—ten years later—that I understood the effort it had been for him to light it.

"The man who gives way to pain," he was to say to me then, "the man who bows his head under it, drops his arms, and slackens his legs, is not a man. Especially if other men who have chosen him for their chief see him unable to walk straight or hold himself upright."

Hartiss, the man from the ditch, refused to mount his companion's horse. He covered the stretch of road beside me on foot.

"If you wish, Hartiss, I can leave the horse with you," his friend said. "Then with the gorgio's bike I can go ahead and let the others know you are all right."

"Go, Rolph," came the answer. "Tell them he will be spending the night with us."

I didn't dare refuse, so I let the Gypsy go ahead on my bicycle. The horse walked at a steady pace by the side of the bank. It was as though I had fallen asleep and it was all a dream. On my other side the Gypsy was silent, apparently absorbed in his own thoughts. From time to time I glanced at him, and when our eyes met in the half darkness I had a feeling of comfort, an impression of peace.

"Don't worry about your mother," he said suddenly, placing his hand on my shoulder. "Her time has not yet come. She still has smiles and tears in store for her."

The way this man spoke astonished me. I had the impression I was listening to an ancient language; it was as though the man who spoke it belonged to an earlier century. I thought that he must have read a great deal and that his archaic language was a result of that reading. "You are mistaken," said the man abruptly. "I don't know how to read."

I remember I stopped short with surprise. He walked on a step or two, then put his hands on my shoulders. At that moment the headlights of a car behind us swept over his face. In that instant I fixed forever in my memory the expression of deep emotion on his face, and I knew he loved me with the same intensity I was later to return.

"You must not hold it against me if I read your thoughts, Pierre," he said. "Between you and me there is nothing strange about that. In fact, nothing is strange except simple things that men cloak in mystery. Life flows like a stream, but few people know the source."

I felt myself falling under a spell I had never known before. My only previous contact with Gypsies was when I was fourteen. On holiday at the home of a gamekeeper, I played with a number of little Gypsies whose chief was called Jean-Michel Mathias. But there was no comparison between the tribal chief Jean-Michel Mathias and Hartiss. Now everything struck me as timeless and far removed from reality. I

had a strong impression of living in a world which bore no resemblance to the one I had known up to that moment.

When I spoke to the man at my side of the joy his friends would feel when they knew he was safe and sound, he replied,

"None of those people you met just now care about how I feel. The only thing that matters to them is my word, the things I have to say to them that they are waiting to hear. The rest of their lives depend upon what I am going to say. For them . . ." He hesitated, and then went on. "For us, I am the law. Two weeks ago I was in Italy, and less than a month ago in the Low Countries.

"In your world you have your judges, your lawyers, your prosecutors. Your judges have nothing in common with the person being judged. With us, our judges and our prosecutors are the friends or the relations of those they have to judge. As far as we are concerned, if a man laying down the law makes one mistake he can no longer dispense justice."

A loud murmur reached our ears. It was a mixture of barking dogs, crying children, and neighing horses. Occasionally a shouted oath broke through the background of sound quickly covered by the shrill voices of the women.

"The men have found the camping site," said the Gypsy. "A night's rest will do you good, my brother."

The voices became louder, and soon we could hear the creaking of the caravan wheels. About two hundred yards from the camping Gypsies my companion stopped and said:

"One woman among all those you will meet has known you for a long time. She is called Sandra, and her behavior will seem very strange to you. Don't let this worry you, for she has drunk deeply of our wisdom and is even more versed in it than I am."

Recognizing familiar sounds, the horse which until then had been ambling along gently by the roadside broke into a trot, its hooves clattering on the tarred

road. Children ran toward us, followed by dogs. And behind the dogs came a fox without a tail, its head low to the ground and a woman walking by its side.

"Sandra!" called Hartiss. "Sandra!"

In the half-light, Sandra looked steadily at me. How old was she? She had an air of youth about her. Her reddish-blond hair fell in long plaits on either side of her face, reaching to her hips. Her long dress revealed beautifully shaped breasts and a small waist. She had pale skin and shining blue eyes. The hands contrasted strangely with the grace of the rest of her body: the fingers were strikingly short and agile. When she smiled she showed broad white teeth, and her lips were full and curved. And yet, at that first meeting, Sandra was over fifty.

"Well," she said as she came toward us, "here he is at last, our long-awaited comrade."

She had a clear, harsh voice. The syllables, particularly at the end of a sentence, were drawn out as if she hadn't finished what she had to say, so much so that no one cared to interrupt her. The children were now running around us, chattering away in a language unknown to me and hanging on the shoulders of my exhausted companion. Once again Sandra's voice rang out clear and strong above the uproar. "Flixie, go up to the camp and tell them all I want French, and only French, spoken tonight."

My rescued friend took Sandra by the arm and said, "Sandra, your words have both wisdom and kindness."

"Oh, Hartiss," she said in her husky voice, "should not one always honor the one who gives life or helps to perpetuate it, and did not this young man save yours?"

A little girl seized hold of my arm and swung herself against my jacket, finally taking my hand and holding it tight.

On my right the tall flame of a fire shot up into the dusk, its light reflected in the waters of a nearby pond. Suddenly I saw the whole camp—caravans,

horses, men, women, and children—all of them watching me walk toward them.

There was a strong odor of oil and burning wood in the air. The little girl still held my hand. The man I had rescued and Sandra followed with the prancing children.

An old man advanced slowly toward me from the waiting group. He held out his hand, and I grasped it.

Then, like a shadowy cloak, the whole magic world of the Gypsies seemed to enfold me, and as our hands met I became what I am now—a stranger to all I had been in earlier years.

If one enters right into the heart of an alien world, it doesn't seem strange anymore. On the station platform of Voves the Gypsy faces all around me were somber and contained.

"So you understand, Pierre, you will go home to your own family tomorrow. Meet us in three days at Chartres. Sandra will explain."

"Alright, Hartiss, I'll tell him all about it," said Sandra, who was with us on the platform. The train arrived in the station in a great burst of smoke and clanking brakes.

Only a few hours earlier the news had broken upon the camp. War had been declared! A barefooted youth had flung himself at Hartiss with the news. Sitting on the wooden steps of a caravan, Hartiss watched the boy running toward him.

"This is it, Pierre, the end of peace," said Hartiss. For even before the boy started speaking, he knew his message: WAR! The news flashed around the encampment. Less than a minute later everyone surrounded Hartiss. They fell back into their tribal tongue, and men and women talked and talked.

A young boy grasped the hands of the man I had rescued from death; although his language was strange to me, I almost managed to make sense of it. But Hartiss interrupted. "Sandra said that as long as our friend here was with us we should all talk in French."

For a moment there was silence; then the conversation started up again.

"Yes, yes, I know," said Hartiss. "But in two weeks you will be safe."

Another young Gypsy stepped forward. "Herbert," said Hartiss, "pull out from here in an hour's time. Rendezvous with young Frantz at nightfall tomorrow at the usual place in Chartres."

As he said this he stood up and put his arms around the shoulders of the youth called Frantz. "In two weeks time," he repeated, "you will be in a place of safety."

The boy threw a quick frightened glance at me. Hartiss, who until then had been speaking softly, suddenly raised his voice and said in a ringing tone, "This man is your brother, Frantz, and you have nothing to fear from him."

I understood. Frantz was a German. I remembered the horrible wounds my father had suffered during the First World War at Verdun. And there I was in front of a German, who had become once again my enemy; but because I had saved the life of this Gypsy sorcerer, this young German had become my "brother."

Fresh cries in Gypsy dialect arose from the surrounding group.

"I said speak French," yelled Hartiss.

Once again there was immediate silence.

"I'll help you pack your bags, Frantz," I said, going toward him. "There's nothing to fear."

Frantz was sixteen years old; I was nineteen. It was the first day of a terrible massacre. Millions of people, among them thousands of Gypsies, were going to pay with their lives for the madness of one man. That day in the heart of the peaceful French countryside I helped a brother Gypsy flee from my own countrymen. When Herbert's caravan on its way to Chartres was no more than a spot on the horizon, I realized that I was no longer my own master but a man who had given his allegiance to others. It was now my

turn to gaze at my companions. They were lined up in front of me like a wedding party placed in position by a photographer: the old, the children, beautiful girls, including one with long raven-black plaits and three tassels of corn-silk thrust behind her left ear. They were poor but free, perpetually chased from one village to another, forced to camp beside rubbish dumps or in empty cattle markets. Twenty pairs of eyes were fixed on me. Hartiss took me by the hand and whispered, "There is no need to say anything. They know."

And no other word was exchanged. The group broke up. The women carried off their children; only the men remained behind. There were four of them: Firmin, the patriarch, who was seventy-one, Arthuro, Solies, and Sampion. In less than an hour everything had been arranged. Arthuro and Sampion, both of an age to be called up, were to return to the Aisne department by train to join their brothers Pierce and Wandol. They would give them the name of the place which was to be the objective for the long march which was given the code name of "Sisteron." Firmin was to set off at dawn for the South with the women, the teenagers, and the children.

And Sandra? No sooner did her name spring to mind than she was there among us. Her small feet seemed to glide over the muddy ground blurred with the morning mist. Her long striped purple and gray skirt swayed from side to side with the movement of her body.

"I'll go with you, Firmin," she said in her deep husky voice. "We'll join the Arrak clan on the N.7. road and those from Avron just outside Paris."

I felt I was walking in my sleep, everything around me seemed so strange. The thought of Frantz filled me with sadness; all my joy had vanished. My bicycle, propped up against a grassy bank, seemed to invite me to get on it and escape. Less than eight miles away my parents would be worrying about my absence. Sandra turned toward me.

"Flight is the coward's way out," she said. "And regrets only fill the hearts of the weak."

I stayed. I helped with all the preparations for departure, and when the silhouette of Hartiss appeared in the doorway of Firmin's caravan, I already felt better.

As I stood on the station platform at Voves watching Arthuro and Sampion waving from their train window, Hartiss's voice was still ringing in my ears and I felt at peace with myself.

We made a strange couple, Sandra and I clinging to each other as the train went out, and the station-master gave us many a curious glance. It had started to rain, the fine, persistent kind of rain that is really more like a damp fog. "Come," said Sandra, taking me by the arm.

Now I knew the road well. Soon in the distance we could see the camp, the lighted windows of the trailers shining like fog lamps. Sandra took hold of my arm more firmly. We walked in silence. Our feet made little slapping sounds in the wet grass. From underneath a caravan the fox yelped, jangling the chain which tied him to the wheels. "Quiet," whispered Sandra.

She jumped neatly over a puddle and up the three steps of her trailer. "Come in," she said. I walked into the shadowy interior of her home on wheels, which was lit only by the faint glimmer of a night light beneath an icon. There was the sound of a match striking, and her face shining with raindrops appeared against the darkness for a moment as she lit the oil lamp.

The light revealed a room such as I had never seen before. It was a timeless place, untouched by accepted canons of custom and taste. The walls and the ceiling were draped in cloth of many bright colors. In place of a bed, silk and leather cushions were heaped in a corner. A cupboard seemed to be suspended from the ceiling, and in the alcove below it a polished samovar shone on a copper tray. Hanging to the left of the samovar were two icons shimmering from the dancing

flame of a colored-glass lamp. An oil stove near the door gave out a cozy heat. Not a table or chair or any kind of cooking utensil was to be seen. Only six bright red china cups swung on their hooks at the slightest movement of the caravan, and on a nearby shelf stood a number of gray earthenware pots sealed with corks.

"Well, that's it," said Sandra.

With one quick gesture she flung off her cape, unbuckled her belt, and let her long skirt slip to the floor. Underneath she wore a long sheathlike dress, the top part of which served as a blouse when she wore her big flouncing overskirt. She hung her skirt up on one of a line of hooks behind a brightly colored curtain, and my jacket and raincoat were hung up beside it. I admired the order and serenity of my surroundings. All was harmonious, nothing jarred. Comfortably installed on a pile of cushions, I gazed around me. Sandra knelt in front of the samovar and started to make tea. From time to time she threw what appeared to be a handful of crystals into the little metal bowl over the pilot flame. This gave off a smoke scented like a bouquet of flowers. This scent bore no resemblance to any other form of incense, usually Arabian or Turkish, that I have since encountered. I think it must have come from India.*

After we had drunk a cup of tea, Sandra, who had been laughing, suddenly stopped, and her eyes met mine. What I felt at that moment was something far outside my very limited emotional experience, and I remember trying to hang on to a fading sense of reality.

"A man who refuses to dream refuses life itself," she said. "And you, if you so wish, can live in the space of an hour what life will take twenty years to

* Blaise Cendrars told me that he had once smelled a similar incense coming from a handful of crystallike grains. They were said to produce a hypnotic effect and were used to calm victims intended for human sacrifice.

bring you. Do you want to? Very few men of your race have ever been given the opportunity to live the life that will be opened to you. If you accept, from this moment you will never be unloved."

I accepted. Then the everyday world seemed to slip away. Sandra grew younger before my eyes. Hypnotism? Witchcraft? I was powerless to say. But the undeniable evidence of my senses told me the fifty-year-old woman had become a young girl. Yet her voice spoke in my ear with its old music that was unlike any other.

"I exist already somewhere else. I am a little girl whom you will only recognize the day you find me. She is my other self, and her power over you will be the same as mine. Together you will be indestructible, but people will want to destroy you. You will be Love, and you will be hated because of it. You alone will breathe the scented flowers of your garden, and you will be strong with love's strength. The gorgios who pass through your life will enter the circle of this aura and will get from it whatever they give you, love or hate. But your lips shall be shields to you both."

At the time these words were incomprehensible to me. But sixteen years later I met a girl who looked as Sandra did then, a girl with the same grace of movement, and she became my wife.

But in the soft darkness of that caravan it was Sandra who took me in her arms, as the lamp's wick crackled intermittently under the icon, and breathed knowledge and love into my body.

In the morning I awoke to the real world. My legs felt heavy and my head empty, and I found it hard to think where I was and what I was doing there. Sandra was making tea.

"Don't fret like that, little wolf," she murmured. "Time starts at the end of time."

The dream had faded with the night, and the woman in front of me doing small domestic tasks was as she had been before. I felt at ease with her. How many

hours and days did I spend with her in that caravan? I find it hard to say; three, perhaps. Never again after that did I have her in my arms. But when I walked out of the door of that caravan without a backward glance, as she had told me to do, I knew well she had traced my future destiny for me and that I owed it to her to go forward and accept that destiny.

I remember word for word Sandra's prophecies. "Your people will not seek you out," she said. "They will wait for you to come to them. They will exclude you from their festivals and ceremonies and later from their funerals. Their friends will not be your friends. As they will not understand you, your ways will seem strange to them. Some will envy or hate you. But you will experience the full weight of love in a way few men are given to know. You will have a full and fruitful existence, and you will know neither regret nor remorse. Those you love will be marked by serenity. Men will come into your life whom you will take to your heart. Between you and them there will be no barriers of blood or race; they will become your brothers and help you to cross the final stages of wisdom which lead to silence. For it is only in silence that a bird distinguishes another's song. You will be shut out from family and public councils, but they will come and seek your advice in secret. Some will think of you as having a bad influence, others will want to follow in your footsteps and model their lives on yours.

"Your guiding rule should be prudence. For the heart of man is like an orchard; often the crop depends on the gardener. Some of your children will be marked with the night sign; they will be the wise offspring of your own tree of life. All those who try to do you evil will have evil returned within seven years. If they have stolen from you, they will be robbed. If they break faith with you, people will not keep their word with them. For them you will be an obsession. But those who love you will find love. As

you get older, for you will grow old, you will possess 'healing fingers' and on certain days clairvoyance. You will force yourself to renounce certain things. Joy will fill your heart to the end of your days, and the ashes that you leave will be hotter than fire."

Those were the predictions of Sandra for me a few days after I had saved the life of Hartiss, the sorcerer. And that is how it all started.

TWO

THE MARKED MEN

Are there certain chosen men whose destiny can only be fulfilled when fate or chance bring them together?

Separately there is nothing special about any of them. It is only when they are together that there is any mystery. The men who taught me all I know were all called Pierre, in its various forms according to their nationality: Peter, Pedro, Pietro. Only one was called Jean, and he was not a Gypsy. I met him when I was in the company of the singer Guy Béart at a cabaret called La Colombe.

At that time Jean did horoscopes for well-known people. He had a room on the quai Bourbon where Jean-Jacques Rousseau had once lived, and he worked out his horoscopes on a tiny table. Some of these were as many as one hundred pages long, and sometimes he needed as much as three weeks of calculations to cast a preliminary draft. People used to tease him. He had lectured on philosophy in many countries, and had lived in India and in China. The mystery which seemed to surround his life was no mystery for me.

He disappeared as silently as he had come, and some people who knew him at that time never saw him again.

Michel Valette, manager of La Colombe, the writer Ange Bastiani, and Jacques Yonnet, the historian, all called him "the Professor." I was the only one to call him Jean, and he the only one who called me Pierre. Michel Valette called me "the Gypsy," Ange Bastiani called me "Pierrot," and Jacques Yonnet called me "the Dove Man," for he had first known me at a time when I was a bird trainer.

It was Jean who helped me to discover all about the "marked men." These are men who at birth carry stigma—the marks of bodily wounds or injuries sustained by their fathers shortly before the child was conceived.

I am a marked man. When I was born on September 17, 1920, my body bore the marks of the wounds my father had received at Verdun. My nurse hid the marks from my mother, and they disappeared within a few weeks. If, as certain specialists insist, stigmata are only the result of hysteria, it is a theory that cannot be applied to a newborn baby. There has to be another reason. It was not until forty years later during a family dinner party that my father told me about the circumstances of my birth. He didn't realize he was also giving me the clue to the pattern behind my encounters with Pitt Zolaroff, known as "Pepe," Pietro Hartiss, and Peter Vandargue, nicknamed "Little Peter," who were all marked men.

Hartiss had a birthmark on his shoulder. It was shaped like a horse's hoof. His father had been kicked on the shoulder by a horse a little while before Hartiss was born. But, unlike my family, who had hidden my birthmarks as if they were blemishes, Hartiss's infant body was exposed to the eyes of his whole tribe so that they could appreciate the significance of his birth. He told me that even as a very young child, hardly able to speak, he realized his parents expected others to treat him with a certain

amount of deference. As for Peter Vandargue, one of the most learned wisemen I have ever met, he carried the stigma of fire burns on his left foot, his father having one day spilled a bowl of molten metal on his foot.

So Little Peter and Pietro Hartiss were singled out from birth to become sorcerers. Little Peter, if he were still alive, would now be over one hundred years old. Hartiss is still alive, age eighty-eight.

After the war of 1870, the big Romany tribes that roved across Europe still clung to all their old ancestral taboos. Their beliefs, their magic were all practiced within the tribal circle. Their secrets were never allowed to penetrate outside their horde. For them, a marked child was known as a "son of truth" or "son of the father." And his mother, honored all her life, was looked upon as a "mother goddess," venerated like statues of the Virgin Mother in Christian cathedrals.

As the phenomenon was rare, one can understand how the birth of a child bearing these kind of marks came to be regarded as something of a miracle, something beyond explanation but which was a good sign. In fact, sorcerers throughout the ages have known that these special birthmarks meant the child would have a receptiveness and sensibility out of the ordinary. As a result, he was reared and educated with special care. The child was always destined to become a sorcerer because he bore the "mark of the star." This mark is the sign that a judge has been born to the tribe to administer justice and ward off hatred. A hundred years ago, the mark of the star on the body of a newborn Gypsy baby was a miracle made flesh, signifying the birth of a guide with extraordinary powers.

"A miracle is something that happens that you can't explain," Hartiss told me one day. "When I was a young man I used to think the cops who arrested me wherever I went were mind readers, because all they had to do to know exactly who I was was to

look at my identity papers and say 'You're the grimy creature who calls himself Pietro Hartiss?' I used to say to myself, How is it that wherever I go the Spanish, French, Swiss, or German police all know everything about me, and yet I know nothing about them? As far as I was concerned, that was a miracle.

"Then, one day in 1928 at Sisteron, two gendarmes stopped the troupe of Bruno Bellon. Five trailers divided between two families—seven horses and two mules, twenty-eight people in all. Bruno's papers were not in order because he had got into the habit of traveling at night. This helped him get across country where Gypsies were outlawed. Bruno was in the wrong, and there was a fine to pay. Seeing that he was in trouble, I went up to the corporal and said, 'Let him go, Lucien, he hasn't done anything really wrong, and there is only you and Henri who know about it. So, for once, let him go.'

"This was the first time in my life I saw fear of me appear in someone's eyes. There they stood, the two gendarmes, as if thunderstruck. I had called them by their Christian names! And I had never seen them before in my life. That day they let us go on without further trouble. But that night, around the campfire, the eyes of my brothers had a new respect in them. I had accomplished my first 'miracle.'"

From that moment Pietro realized that he could read minds, and his companions began to look on him as a true sorcerer. Before the incident at Sisteron he had the title; afterward he had both the power and the title.

This power carries a great burden of responsibility. It goes further than that of a tribal leader. Its holder has to penetrate into the very soul of the members of his tribe. The sorcerer is the "father confessor" of the tribal chief. He has to show wisdom and make his strength felt through knowledge. For the man who holds the title it is a permanent responsibility, day and night. He has to be completely dedicated to the task.

The *kako*, the wiseman, is to the Romany tribe

what the lightning conductor is to our stone houses: more than a protection, a sort of human filter which masters destructive forces and returns them whence they came.

So it was that as a gorgio marked with the stigma of the marked men I was impelled by a force outside my control to follow the path set for me by the master sorcerers. To oppose it would have been to destroy myself. Where do these powers come from? I don't know. I leave that to specialists of the occult sciences. I just submitted, as did Peter, Pedro, and Pietro.

It is curious it was the marked men themselves who initiated me. According to Jean, the Professor, there is only one marked man for every two million people, and the chances that two should meet—let alone several—are infinitesimal.

II

The Occult Powers

THREE

THE LOOK

"To see is to cross the barriers of the flesh."
Pietro Hartiss

It takes a long time to develop certain extrasensory powers and to attain to the level of a *kako*, a sorcerer. The weird powers of the *kakos* form part of Gypsy medical lore and are a mixture of homeopathy, psychosomatic medicine, and simple sorcery. Their therapeutic methods combine psychological suggestion, hypnosis techniques, and certain elements of witchcraft. Among the latter is the art of "the Look." It can be employed defensively or aggressively; it is, however, frequently used by sorcerers to calm people or to gain their confidence.

My first contact with this kind of extrasensory phenomena took place toward the end of 1939. I was with Pietro Hartiss and we were having our morning coffee at a little café in one of the winding streets behind Chartres Cathedral. We were sitting at a corner table. On my side was a bench which ran the entire length of the café. Beside me, on the same bench, a young woman was trying to persuade a little boy to drink a cup of chocolate. She was crying. Pietro was sitting opposite me. It was the fourth time I had met him, and there was a special reason for his visit. He had at last decided I should teach him to read and had himself chosen where the first lesson was

to take place; the "Gypsy pillar" inside the cathedral. I also learned that day that in all churches with a Lady Chapel or with an altar to Sara the Kali, the Black Virgin, there is a secret place where occult nomad chiefs used to meet.

As I was about to leave the table, Hartiss said, "Don't go yet." So I stayed where I was.

Then, rising from his chair, he went to sit at the next table, where the young woman was crying. Suddenly it struck me that this man whose life I had saved was not like other men. Yet, for the moment he did nothing more than sit down opposite the young woman and look steadily at her and at the child.

It dawned on me that I had become the involuntary participant in a strange happening. I felt a kind of fatigue creep over me, which did not seem to spring from any form of ill health. The unknown woman stopped crying and a slight smile appeared on her lips. She seemed fascinated and unable to take her eyes off Hartiss, who began to speak to her in a low voice.

"No, you are not alone," he murmured. "I'm here and I have looked at you, and all is well. Listen to me: you are not alone; I have looked at you and you are well."

"I am well," said the young woman, whose face seemed to be transformed. And Pietro went on speaking. His voice sounded strange to my ears; the intonation was different. The man himself had changed. His face seemed to be carved out of stone. Only his lips, beneath his big mustache, had a life of their own.

The murmur continued: "You owe yourself to life. For life belongs to this little boy here, and you must go on living."

"I must go on living," repeated the young woman.

"Why?" asked Pietro.

"Because my life belongs to my little boy."

"That is good. You may go now. I will pay for what you have ordered. Look at me closely once more,

so that you will remember me on the days when you will feel as you do today."

I had the impression of two statues facing each other. And then the tension broke. He went with her to the door, raised his hand in farewell, and came back into the café. He walked toward a curtained doorway that gave access to the adjoining grocery store of which the café was a part, and soon came back with a Camembert cheese, a piece of hard sausage, and half a loaf. He sat down again opposite me and gave his order.

"A carafe of white wine please, Madame Jeanne."

As she put it down on our table, the proprietress of the café looked at me and said, "So, sorcerer, this is your son?"

"This is my son," he said calmly.

He seemed to have aged about ten years in as many minutes. His eyes met mine.

"Do you know what I have just done?"

"I think I do."

"Tell me."

"You have just prevented a suicide."

"Do you know what you have just done?"

"No."

"You have been able to read my thoughts, and that is a sign."

"A sign? What sign?"

"A sign that you have 'the gift.'"

"You mean that I too . . . ?"

"Yes, if you wish to, you have the power. But it is exhausting and will take more out of you than if you gave your blood. It is not something you can do right away. Before you get to that point you will have to renounce many things. Few men are able to get to the end of the road. And that is fortunate, because there is a deep choice between good and evil to be faced. Everything depends on the man himself. Have you already given your blood, Pierre, to save another man?"

"No."

"One day, do so if the occasion arises. But what you give will not be anything so very out of the ordinary, because it is something any man can do. But what you have seen today is in reach of very few. And yet at birth, everyone has the seeds of it in him. A little while ago, you heard me called 'sorcerer.' One day, you too, like me, will be called a sorcerer, and you will think then, as I do now, that *sorcery* and *magic* are only words invented by men who are too weak to be able to know and use their natural forces. Everything is inscribed in the universe. Man has invented nothing; he has only made discoveries, and often discoveries that bring about absurd situations. He has invented machines and forgotten that he himself is a machine. For man is the only machine that regulates its own mechanism. He can possess clairvoyance and the power to relieve pain, only he doesn't know it. Unaware that he is both machine and mechanic, he deserts nature and resorts more and more to artifice. What is artificial kills man little by little, so when he meets someone who has rediscovered the old natural laws he calls him a sorcerer.

"Anyone can acquire the technique of the Look if he finds the right teacher and has the will to learn. As to developing it and making it work, that is a question of gift. In the face of the unknown, the seer remains conscious of his immense ignorance. He realizes this power he believes he possesses is only the first faltering steps. There are several ways to 'look' at someone, and some happen on the impulse of the moment. A seer is sometimes a long way from realizing his own power. The poor sorcerer is often on the brink of disaster, juggling with powers he believes are under his control, but which in fact control him—and terrify him, for this power is double-edged. The slightest error and it is the 'unforeseen in the unseen' which takes over. The man who has conjured up the power then dwindles to no more than a helpless spectator."

Romanies who possess this power in a more or less raw form usually use it in their contact with animals. An animal shows its love or hate in physical ways. It has no intellectual means of expressing its sentiments; and yet a dog is capable of dying from love of a lost master, and a tiger will refuse to eat if it loses its trainer. Actually the only real channels of communication between men and animals are the voice and, particularly, the eyes.

I have lived with both dog trainers and tiger tamers. One day I witnessed an "eye-to-eye" conversation between the tamer Gilbert Houcq and one of his tigresses, and I had the same sensation of a mysterious telepathic exchange I had felt that day at Chartres between Hartiss and the young woman who wanted to kill herself.

I have never met an animal tamer who was also a sorcerer, but I have met a good dozen or so sorcerers, and they all had a strong need to have an animal by their side. I would go so far as to say they *had* to have an animal, that its presence was indispensable to them. Among the wandering wisemen of large or small Romany tribes, I have never met a sorcerer who didn't share his life with at least one animal.

I discovered some of the reasons for this when, in 1957, I visited the camp of the Oursouris tribe, led by Grima Mellatti. The Gypsy seers have established a relationship between the faculties they themselves possess and the animals who surround them. The relationship is probably more than just symbolic, but I don't know exactly how it operates. I learned there are seven animals who have a special contact with the art of the seer. Grima Mellatti, probably deliberately, only told me of four.

The glowworm is by daylight an insignificant creature but becomes a shining little star at night. The bat sees its way clearly in the dark. The owl can only see well at night and perfectly symbolizes the art of extrasensory perception. As for the toad, it represents

both insight into the soul and fecundity, for the shape of its body is that of the uterus upside down. The characteristics of these animals are mysteriously linked to a form of perception quite out of the ordinary. This is connected with the importance of night, which hides what should remain secret, both ugliness and physical imperfections, which repel the noninitiated. These seven animals also have a relationship with the seven planets, which, mentally projected onto an unknown face, are the seven fixed points essential for developing the technique of the Look.

It was in front of the Gypsy pillar in Chartres Cathedral that Hartiss instructed me in the first steps that have to be accomplished before one can achieve the power of the Look. With the Gypsies the process of elevation to a higher state has almost always to pass through a stage of spiritual discipline. And it is not until this stage has been traversed that one encounters any physical ordeals.

"Let's work out how much time you lose each week," said Hartiss. "Each day one and a half hours playing cards. One hour doing crossword puzzles five days a week makes eleven and a half hours. The Saturday dance, six hours. The same on Sunday. So, that means that each week you lose twenty-four hours of your life in futile things. If you wish to approach the knowledge of wisdom you must cut out useless things which block your way. If you want one day to have a power which resembles mine you will have to give up your lost time, for lost time in a man's life is dead time. If you want, I will tell you how to attain 'living' time."

"What do you want me to do? I don't know how to begin."

"All you have to do is give up your dead time."

"And in its place?"

"Look for living time."

"How?"

"Don't go dancing; make love to the girls instead. Don't do crossword puzzles; learn something new.

Don't play cards; do spiritual exercises. I will show you how."

My testing period lasted a year. At the end of 1940, I felt myself to be a different man, governed by the discipline of silence. My transformation was achieved secretly, for secrecy was necessary in order to kill my pride. I trained myself to listen to the futile conversation of others and not to open my mouth to contradict those who held opinions different from mine. One day when I had completely defeated another man in an argument, Hartiss had said to me:

"You have just broken one of the laws of our secret teaching. You are like an unripe fruit, and the sun that will ripen you comes from the mouths of fools and imbeciles. That is why you should listen in silence when they talk in public, because man is sometimes nourished by the very opposite of what he wishes to attain."

STRANGE AFFINITY

And then, one day in Chartres he introduced me to a man I had never met before, a peddler with a lively, mobile face.

"I'm handing my son over to you. Put muscle into his arm," Hartiss said.

I had reached the next stage of my initiation. The name of my new master was Adolphe Brégeon. This workmanlike healer, who died in Dachau in 1944, taught eye exercises to young fairground boys who were training to be jugglers. They were then made to perform the same exercises blindfolded. An automatic reflex conditioned by mental concentration works more smoothly than a muscular reflex, like walking, which does not require preliminary reflection. According to Brégeon, visual perception changes with age. The distance of an object seen at the age of seven is not the same as when observed by a fourteen-year-old. This was probably why Brégeon both started and ended his training for the young Gypsy

boys between those two ages. At fourteen a young Gypsy is considered to be adult and completely responsible for his own acts.

A good half of the procedure consisted of exercises done with the eyes shut. In these exercises one was instructed to think of a number of geometric figures, to transpose them and move them about up and down, right and left, or to break up the pattern completely. These eye gymnastics with the lids shut were intended not only to strengthen the eye muscles but to help the apprentice juggler evaluate the distance between objects. This apparently uncultured man possessed the full power of the Look, which he maintained by rigorous discipline. The keenness of his eyesight was prodigious; he was able to read a newspaper held out at arm's length or touching the end of his nose. But in addition, Brégeon had a very special gift, that of composing his face into any expression he wished without his inner self being in any way affected. His power was such that he was able to bring anyone facing him to the state of mind he wished the other to have, without the man even being aware that he was being controlled by the sheer power of a disciplined gaze. This form of visual control was similar to that exercised over a horse to make him flex his muscles to jump. Based on a sort of yoga of the eyes, this technique gave to whoever practiced it what Brégeon called "strange affinity," an absolute tranquillity and peace of mind in all circumstances.

Chance is quite often the gateway to discovery. As a very young man, Adolphe Brégeon found that when he was trying to cure neuralgia and nerve pains with a laying on of hands, he had to find a spot or object on which to fix his gaze, and that however hard he tried to anchor his glance the spot would appear to move. When he shut his eyes, his memory reformed the object, which would continue its course. If he mentally forced it back to the lower rim of his field of vision, it would start to move upward again. Adolphe Brégeon had discovered mental vi-

sion for himself. But as he was not a learned man, he had no knowledge of optical science or of anything that stemmed from it.

From 1921 to 1928 the Gypsy healer worked on a method which would help his eyes relax when, as sometimes happened at certain séances, he was obliged to fix his eyes steadily for two or three hours at a time. It was thus he developed a method of double vision whereby he could see two sharply clear images of the same object and could then, with one muscular contraction of the eyes, merge them again. Opticians recognize this as a well-authenticated phenomenon.

In 1932 Brégeon became part of a traveling fair and was billed as the "Robot Man." It was while he was standing on the platform of the fairground lottery that he realized he could "will" the spectators strolling by into buying lottery tickets. It was at that point in his career that he met up with the fakir d'Army, an authentic hypnotist but a charlatan nevertheless, who managed to make a very good living from traveling around country fairgrounds. They formed a partnership. In addition to the quack medicine from which they made a living, they perfected a form of psychosomatic medical treatment. The former journalist Recordier, a partner of the clown Boulicot, followed their work and later put them in touch with the acrobat Charlie Clérans, a former chemistry student, who was killed at the Gaumont Palace in 1949. Their manuscript is lodged in a secret place somewhere, and no one has been able to find it. This is a pity, because it contains all the discoveries made by Brégeon and d'Army.

The exercises of strange affinity consisted mainly of optical contractions, a highly developed breathing technique, controlled thinking, and a technique for relaxing the senses.

The old fakir d'Army had lived for over thirty years in the Far East, so it is easy to understand how he was able to bring back with him the sort of knowledge

which helped him develop his bogus act, yet which was of great use when added to the discoveries of Brégeon. The four exercises cited above are more or less indispensable for the achievement of strange affinity. They also have links with all forms of yoga, and so are very readily open to adaptation.

So these two more or less illiterate men put together an intricate technique, discovering for themselves the kind of procedures that Gypsy seers practice by instinct. Among all the different exercises Brégeon employed to improve some of his fairground acts was one well worth setting down in detail. As well as great concentration, it demands considerable physical effort.

Plate 1 shows a mask held in such a way that the eyes are formed by the thumbnails of each hand fixed into the eye sockets. The thumbnails are varnished black. The exercise requires the student to stand in front of a mirror and raise the mask with arms outstretched straight in front of him until his thumbnails become fixed in the reflection of his face. In other words, the false gaze of the mask is on a level with the student's own gaze, which it covers. He must hold it in this position as long as he possibly can. After a while his arms will begin to ache with the strain. To help overcome the pain, he breathes rhythmically and deeply. Then he lets his left arm drop down and hang beside his body while continuing to hold the mask with his right arm. The mask will then be one-eyed, because the thumbnail simulating an eye has been removed.

The student continues this exercise, alternating the arm movement so that the mask is always held up in front of his eyes by one arm or the other. One day, between seven to twelve months after beginning to practice the exercise, the student will notice a dark mark appear in the eye orbit of the mask. By perseverance he will one day be able to recreate visually the mark of his thumbnail. After he has successfully completed this first stage, he goes on to the second. For this he moves the mask, still held at arm's length, up and down in front of his eyes like a vertical clock

pendulum. Then one day, instead of his black-varnished thumbnails moving up and down, he will see a reflection of his own eyes. This optical illusion is only achieved after a great deal of patience and, it must be admitted, courage to bear the muscular pain in the arms, which becomes acute with recurrent stabbing pains. After completing the second stage, the student is ready to try the practical side of the experiment, which will enable him to practice strange affinity.

This is how to proceed. By practicing eye gymnastics, of which I have just given several examples, the student must be able to fix his gaze so that nothing distracts him from the point he has chosen to stare at. When he has successfully completed these exercises he is then ready to test his ability with a human face.

The student must first of all try to mentally project a star with five points onto the face of the person with whom he is trying to communicate. The points should touch the cheeks, the temples, and the forehead. With a little experience he can even reduce the field of his mental projection to that of a pentagon within the star.

This done, he should study the personality of the owner of the face. He must look for a focal point on the face which will be, as it were, its asymmetrical center. This could be a mole or beauty spot, or a point just above the eyebrows. Each face has a different "point of departure." Finding this point, which is absolutely indispensable for the success of the entire experiment, is a very difficult feat to accomplish; and some can never manage it. It requires either a profound study of the face in front of one or an instinctive gift.

If one manages to localize a sixth point on the face, then one can find the seventh, which is diametrically opposite it. For example, if the sixth point is at the extreme right of the right eyebrow, the seventh will be on the left cheek approximately at the level of the mouth.

These seven points have the names of planets. The

first point, or point of departure, is Saturn; the corresponding one, Jupiter. The others are Mars, the sun, Uranus, Mercury, and the moon. With a little practice the seer can pick out these seven points simultaneously at a glance. The science of the Look, then, consists of letting one's gaze move from one point to another, *enveloping the face almost without moving the eyes.*

The patient then becomes passive—if this is what the seer wishes—and ready to receive any suggestion. It is for this reason that the starting point known as Saturn, without which the whole operation is impossible, symbolizes—according to Brégeon—clarity, sincerity, and tranquillity. Certain faces are, however, completely resistant to the Look.

Among the faces shown in plate 2 is that of Hartiss at the age of seventy. His point of departure, Saturn, is situated at the point of the "third eye" between his eyebrows. This means that it coincides almost exactly with the vertical point of the star. This rules out two of the points and makes his a perfect example of a hermetic face.

It cannot be stressed too often how dangerous it is to meddle with this form of strange affinity, because it can produce some nasty surprises.

"Don't try too hard, son," Adolphe Brégeon advised me one day, when I had triumphantly succeeded in fixing my look on the side of his left eye. "It's not enough to throw your marbles; you have to know how to get them back."

To sum up, the gift of the Look is generally used for healing purposes. But before applying the treatment, the *kako* must first lay bare by a process of intuition the personality in need of cure and the origin of the patient's trouble. This almost miraculous detection depends on a process of mind reading, a paranormal faculty which will be discussed in the next chapter.

FOUR

MIND READING

THE FIRST EXPERIENCE

To read another's thoughts is not really to read them, but to experience what he experiences. It is a form of involuntary sharing which is often sudden and unforeseen. One becomes in some way similar to the being of the other person. It is impossible to set out to induce this condition; it happens or it doesn't.

From one second to another one develops the absolute certainty of a psychic disturbance around one without knowing why or what caused it. One becomes a sort of thermometer which registers the fear, worry, or confusion of someone else. And yet the ability to read minds can be acquired by practicing a lengthy asceticism controlled by a sage or wiseman, someone who is a complete initiate.

It became reality for me the night of September 18, 1956. That night I and the author Albert Vidalie decided to go out on the town together in search of what he called "a doubtful probability." Quite often these excursions would lead to all sorts of fantastic adventures, for his celebrity had not in any way changed his singular personality. We went from bar to bar looking for I don't know quite what—some particular drink, I think it was, that we remembered as being something very special and was not now to be found.

We went into the Bar Bac. Suddenly, in the smoky

atmosphere I felt as if I had received an electric shock. In the middle of that crush of people, everyone from actors to down-and-outs, and with the welcoming shouts for Albert's arrival going on around us, I saw her sitting in front of a cold undrunk cup of coffee. For the first time in my life I found I was entering another person's thoughts. I had become a seer. And how different it all was from what I had imagined. In this airless bar on rue du Bac, I had suddenly become the "Sun Man" for this young woman as I murmured, "You have no right to do it. Your life is your own, but the life in your womb is not yours. If you kill yourself, then you will kill that other life, which is not yours. Who knows? That seed in your body might become a great musician, a great artist, or a scientist—who knows? Or it might be someone just like everyone else. Like me, for instance. If I hadn't been born I would not be able to be here tonight. And you would be alone. But you are not alone; because you carry inside you the being who will destroy your loneliness, and it is for that human being you must live."

Little by little I became part of her. My gaze seemed to take a palpable form and leave my body. In front of me this unknown girl seemed to let herself be moved by the spell of "the Word" and the Look.

When I watched her leave, swallowed up again by the life of the city, I knew the Seine was no longer her destination. A strange tiredness crept over me; my shoulders seemed to be carrying an immense burden. It was the backlash. I was like a laborer worn out after a heavy task. This tiredness was good for me and reassured me. I felt myself once more restored to human dimensions, and my bodily fatigue was no more than the victory of mind over matter. All at once, seventeen years spent trying to achieve this strange power were brushed aside. The old legends of the Sun Men, the great sorcerers, told in whispers by the light of the campfire at night when the dancing and guitar playing were over, had become a reality for me.

I had lost sight of my friend Vidalie, who was prob-

ably on his way to another bar or nightclub, and in the early dawn I recalled the words of old Hartiss, who a long time before had said to me, "One day, you will see, it will feel as if you have been struck across the face with a whip. You will become the prisoner of the force you have been seeking. And the day you think you are in full possession of it, it will hold you at its mercy. It can be wonderful or sordid. In any case, you will possess the two powers, the magical and the sordid, and they will come at the moment you least expect them."

Still today, the words of the old man come back to me clearly again and again. Another of his dicta comes to mind: "Nothing can be crueller than the fox when it knows it has been discovered. So, each time you have a revelation it is like a theft. And a good thief should know how to hide his loot."

There are times when I hate this power which enables me to cross the invisible threshold of the mind. It fills me with a kind of apathy and dislike for human contact. At such times I have an absolute need of glances that are not human, and the presence of a dog helps me to bear unwelcome human contacts.

Perhaps one of the reasons why I refused to develop my powers past a certain point is that one day I watched Hartiss sense and pick out four murderers among the crowd which filled the tent of the Britannic Circus. Despite Hartiss's assurance that this was a rare occurrence in the life of a seer, I shall never forget his despairing expression that day.

It would, however, be unjust to forget there are very real compensations. To be able first with a mind reading and then with the Look to save the life of an intended suicide or to help free someone from the inner fears which beset him gives reason and meaning to one's whole existence.

Curiously enough, this phenomenon of involuntary and unexpected mind reading usually only takes place if the "patient" is of the opposite sex. In my own case, for every hundred mind readings of that

sort, ninety-five percent have been with women. Sandra only used her mind-reading technique on men. This indicates that the kind of emotional contact necessary for this form of clairvoyance has its base in the opposition of the sexes, which is the fundamental source of all creation.

THE SIGN OF THE SUN

Here again, I cite one of my own personal experiences. It was three days before the opening of the 1971 "Gala des Artistes" at Paris's Cirque d'Hiver. Inside, their cage set on an enormous carpet of coconut matting, three bored-looking tigers were padding silently around and around. By my side was André Wassereau, who was in charge of the horses. He had the completely detached air that many circus people have outside the ring, as if lost in another world. The old clown Béby told me when he was a young circus rider he would sometimes spend hours just gazing at the empty ring, and he dreamed about it often. In his dreams he would imagine his own act so clearly he could sometimes correct acrobatic faults he had seen in his dream performance. Anyway, to get back to the Cirque d'Hiver, the three tigers were awaiting the arrival of their trainer, Joseph Bouglione, who was late for the rehearsal. The performers were sitting around in the boxes, stalls, and on the wooden seats, watching the pacing animals. Television cameramen waited patiently by the side of the ring.

Comfortably installed in a ringside plush seat, I glanced casually around me at a scene I now knew well. My eye passed over one actor and actress after another without particular interest. Suddenly I sat bolt upright. On the other side of the ring in the fourth row of the stalls near the animals' entrance tunnel, two women were talking together in front of the tigers' cage, and I felt the fear of one of them beat through me like a cracking whip. I sensed a fear so intense it took concrete shape for me, and if I had been

a sculptor I could immediately have carved its outline. Turning toward my friend, I asked, "Do you know those two women over there?"

"Of course," he replied. "It's Juliette Greco and a friend of hers. She is scheduled to present the tigers with Joseph, and she's already been waiting an hour for rehearsal."

So, this woman who was sweating with fear through every pore in her body was going to have to face the tigers. And I knew those particular beasts. They were not and had never been drugged. A year before I had been present when they had arrived from their native Bengal, and I had watched the early stages of their training. I began to feel my own fear for Greco as well as sensing hers. Then I noticed there were several other trainers standing around the cage. Any circus man knows that the presence of five trainers around a cage means there are going to be two trainers working inside. For these five men Juliette Greco was not a celebrated actress but a tamer who was about to face danger.

Growing within me was the certainty that I could cure Juliette Greco of her fear. My instructors had taught me how I could do it, but I knew that in order for me to set anything in motion she would have to admit to me how she felt. I thought it would be difficult but perhaps not impossible. So many odd things had been part of my life I didn't think this one particularly exceptional.

The recommendations of old Hartiss came to mind: "Don't force anything! Let things ride. Be like a cat waiting to pounce on a mouse or a bird. If you're not sure of yourself leave things to chance, because chance so often works in your favor."

A man came into the ring and said, "Monsieur Bouglione will be here in forty-five minutes and says the rehearsal should not start without him."

Everyone sitting around in the circus ring seemed to relax at these words. Juliette Greco had disappeared. It had happened before that I had been unable

to follow through and help someone through force of circumstances, and this always left me feeling as powerless as an unwound clock. I decided to stay for the rehearsal. While awaiting the arrival of Bouglione I went to the artists' bar, where I joined another friend, the puppet master Bob Gouge. We sat at a little table near the bar, which slowly filled up with cameramen and circus hands. Suddenly Juliette Greco came in accompanied by a party of friends. By chance she stood by the bar right in front of the table where I was sitting. It only remained for me to catch her glance. When her eyes rested on me for a second, I fixed them with mine and held on. A look of surprise came over her face. All fear seemed to have left her. After a moment I lowered my eyelids. As if relieved, Juliette Greco joined her group of friends, but I could sense she felt curiously drawn toward our table.

Five times her eyes met mine, and five times I held them with my gaze. I peeled away the gilded shell of the celebrity, to bring to light the woman beneath who was like other women. Realizing what was going on, my friend sat silently by. Once again I caught her glance, and this time I rose.

"Will you come?" I said.

She looked at me in astonishment.

"Will you come with me? I have something to tell you."

My friend and I left our table, and Juliette Greco joined us outside on the pavement.

"You're frightened of the tigers?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "terribly afraid."

"Listen to me. If you follow my advice you won't feel frightened anymore. I am going to show you the 'sign of the sun.' It will free you from your fears, make you receptive and without apprehension. It is the same sign the trainers of performing bears used and Gypsy women tamers more than a century ago. An old Gypsy sorcerer taught it to me. Do you want me to tell you?"

"Oh, yes!"

I then showed her how to shut her fist keeping her thumb wedged between the second and third fingers and contracting her muscles as hard as she could until they hurt. She had to do this before entering the ring. Her hand would then become a fixed point of concentration, and by thinking of me at the same time she would overcome her fear.

"Go now, I've nothing more to tell you. You will see later when you rehearse: all will go well as long as you don't forget what I have just taught you."

For the last time her eyes caught mine, but my gaze was already overshadowed by the backlash of tiredness. She held out her hand, and I kept it awhile in mine.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you."

She returned to the bar and was surrounded by her friends again. My companion the puppet master had stayed quietly by my side throughout all this. He knew his physical presence gave me support while I recovered my normal vitality. Then he left me on the sidewalk with three days ahead of me to carry out what I had undertaken.

The words of Hartiss and Sandra came into my mind. How would they have tackled this problem?

"If you draw back, it means destruction," they had said. "The power is inside you, so plunge forward like an arrow toward its target."

"There is no point in lighting a candle," Sandra used to say, "unless you protect it from the wind."

I had a confused sort of feeling that my presence inside the circus during rehearsal would break the slender links I had established with Juliette Greco, and that I was of more use to her if I stayed away. The following day, well before the circus opened its doors, I walked all around it, from the ring to the stables and from the stables to the big cat house. The tigers padding around in slow circular motion filled me with a feeling of calm.

"The sign of the sun," I said to the actress when I ran into her at the entrance to the pen.

"It worked," she said with a smile. "Thank you."

I made myself scarce. Instinctively I felt that when she was about to enter the tigers' cage she should not set eyes on me. She looked around for me, though. But I was trusting to her to make the sign of the sun and to associate it with my presence.

I was in the state of mind of a surgeon just before his first big operation. I felt under a spell, and its long duration seemed almost too much for me. I felt I had perhaps overestimated my powers. However, the actress once again succeeded in overcoming her fear.

I had known Juliette Greco in earlier days at the time of the existentialist cult after the war. She was the goddess of Paris's Left Bank, and I was a turbulent wanderer. I realized that had she recognized me, this memory would have broken the spell. In my years of contact with the Gypsies my features have grown to resemble theirs to a point where my old friends recognize me only by my eyes.

The next day was the opening night, and I had a feeling if I saw her again myself it would do no good. I decided to send my elder son, Patt, in my place. Often Hartiss had used me in the same way on similar occasions. In spite of the fact that they were only eleven and nine years old, my sons, Patt and Steph, were already initiated into certain things and they understood a lot more. They had both watched me work as a healer and seen me place my hands on twisted and aching muscles. I knew that at puberty any powers they might have inherited would either be confirmed or would disappear. At fourteen, the young Romany boy is set for life. Hartiss used to say that even if this man of fourteen lived to the age of the patriarchs nothing could alter his outlook. His formative years are the four years between ten and fourteen. So, the day of the premiere I gave my son the sign of the sun, explained to him the movement of the hand which controlled fear, and sent him off to Juliette Greco. Once more it worked. The television and press cameras recorded Juliette Greco's move-

ment with her fist before she seized the whip and the prod, for then both hands are occupied. The sign has to be made before the work starts; it is, as it were, the key that opens the lock of serenity. For it to work properly the one who has given the sign should make his presence felt by word or look when the sign is needed. Any means of communication will do to get the message across. I had already used the telephone to prevent nervous cases committing suicide. This time I sent a cable.

I knew, and Little Peter had shown me, that writing and hieroglyphics carry the same weight as the Look. At five in the afternoon I sent an unsigned telegram to Juliette Greco which said, "All will go well tonight if you live by the sign of the sun." All did go well, and my role was over.

I knew that when she made the sign of the sun she would enter the cage with fear, but this fear would be a calm fear. It is better to suffer in tranquillity than in anxiety. Anxiety paralyzes both instinct and intelligence, while tranquillity sublimates them. So my masters have taught me.

INDUCING CLAIRVOYANCE

There are ways in which a state of clairvoyance can be intentionally induced. Mind reading obeys laws which are not physical, but which are nevertheless just as real. Certain civilizations, notably those of the East, have codified the principles of clairvoyance, but unfortunately their sources are not readily available. The Gypsies know nothing of these principles, and to the best of my knowledge have never tried to find out. They are content with simply practicing what they know with the maximum amount of efficiency. Realizing my own powers must have some natural explanation, I have tried to discover what that mechanism might be—without very much success, I fear. But, even so, certain truths stand out.

Hartiss had always impressed on me it was impor-

tant to know one's own capabilities—both physical and mental—fully. The man who really knows his own strength and can discover the latent forces within himself is able to bear much more easily the discipline needed to achieve a harmonious state of mind.

All through the ages Gypsies have been associated with clairvoyance, prophecy, and palmistry. While none of that is my concern, nevertheless these things are linked to my subject by certain basic techniques which are the same. I don't intend to go into the methods of fortune-telling as practiced by the high priestesses of tea leaves and the crystal ball. I know little or nothing about them. I do know, however, that certain ways of doing things, certain operational methods, are common to all. For instance, an ordinary fortune-teller always needs to have some kind of "support"—an object such as the famous crystal ball, a simple glass, or sometimes a starfish with twelve tips held upright by a trident from the Camargue. She can also ask her client to stand up while she sits down, and to hold a glass of water in position while showing her the backs of his hands. This odd position apparently aids concentration and helps provoke a state of clairvoyance. The object, whether ball or glass, should preferably be transparent, because this symbolizes the frailty and weakness of the soul and the faculty of the seer to see through these mysteries.

It can also happen that a blow can induce clairvoyance. I knew an old Gypsy who could attain a state of trance only if she received an unexpected blow—as, for instance, when a gendarme hustled her. Her clairvoyance and predictions, not always very favorable but astonishingly accurate, used to leave the police stunned.

When there are no objects available, the Gypsy usually uses a third person. In the street, fortune-tellers usually go in pairs, one being the support of the other. From which, of course, comes the saying, "When one Gypsy reads your hands, the other will

be picking your pockets." Which can sometimes happen! However, the presence of this second person is an absolute necessity. I have been able to establish for myself the effectiveness of such support when I have gone into a state of clairvoyance, quite unexpectedly, in the presence of guests. A close study of these occasions has disclosed that each time it happened the seating of the guests at my table fell into the same pattern.

When we are eight at table I always sit right at the end on the extreme left, my wife and two sons on my right. Facing me are my four guests. Thus two radically different magnetic fields are facing one another. Always, at some point, I am able to read the thoughts of the person immediately opposite me. I thought at first it was just coincidence. But it only happened when the chairs were arranged like that. I recall the words of Hartiss: "Magic does not really exist. Everything is part of a natural order. And what men call a miracle is just a name to cover their ignorance."

During a normal conversation the line of one's gaze goes in every direction according to who is speaking, for one's eyes always fix on the face of the speaker; it is almost inevitable. Even a blind man turns his face toward whoever is speaking.

Try this little experiment the next time you have a family lunch or guests for dinner. Notice the person who has the least to say for himself and watch what he does with his eyes. You will find that probably he has his gaze fixed almost exclusively on the two people who have most to say. And that these two, particularly if they are arguing, have their eyes glued to one another as if they were powerless to break apart. For them the other guests are simply stabilizers.

Intense conversation does in fact set up a sort of magnetic field. Anyone who has enough sensitivity to canalize this magnetism can unwittingly become the agent for a thought-reading experience if the circumstances are favorable. I say unwittingly because

no matter if one is a Gypsy *kako* or a gorgio with this special gift, he can fall into a kind of trance in which some inner being seems to take him over. The seer feels, so to speak, "violated" by this force, and so he turns it outward by himself violating the inner thoughts of the person opposite. The words coming out of his mouth are not really his own. The tone is always direct, curt, sometimes wounding. He imposes silence. All that is to be heard is the voice of the seer, and his words are rough and without pretense.

But let me tell you one of my own experiences. One night my wife and I and our two sons were invited to dinner by a friend whom I had not seen for a long while. As is usual on such occasions, we were all very merry, full of talk and laughter. My hosts had also invited two other friends of theirs, two traveling salesmen who were talkative, coarse, amusing. We all got on well together, and after a time at the bar, we took our places at the table. The talk then became more subdued, turning to stories about neighborhood friends and family memories. The atmosphere was lighthearted, the food good, and we progressed very easily from the hors d'oeuvres to the cheese. Each one of us had some story to tell about an uncle, an aunt, or a cousin. It was like a competition to see who had the funniest aunt, the oddest cousin, or the wittiest grandfather. I had just finished telling a story about my grandmother, whose lively ways had always amused me. It was then the man sitting opposite me started to speak about his father. I can still recall the expression on his face and the intensity he put into his story. Everyone was listening raptly.

Suddenly I had a strange sensation that something was about to happen. I began to experience the signs that usually precede a state of clairvoyance: a pressure on the back of my head like a vise first of all grips the base of my skull and then moves to the top of my head, my breathing becomes light and shallow, and a force I can't resist compels me to speak. And that day the words that poured out of

my mouth completely destroyed the mood of the party.

"Liar," I shouted.

The word was followed by a frozen silence. Everyone looked at me in astonishment. The man to whom it was addressed stopped short in his story and gazed at me, his mouth open.

"Why do you lie like that?" I asked. "Why invent a father for yourself, a father you have never known? Your family is an orphanage."

The silence deepened. The man who had been talking sat slumped in his chair with a look of desperation on his face. I knew that the truth of such accusations always left the victim completely cowed and empty, without the energy to react. I had destroyed something in him, and yet I hardly knew him.

The Gypsy wisemen had always advised me to follow up a mind reading with words of encouragement and comfort driven home by a concentrated look. A flow of words came out of my mouth as I fixed his eyes with mine.

"A little while ago you were completely alone, and you have been alone for a very long time. Now you are with us, and you no longer have any reason to hide something you feel is a blight on your life. To be a child brought up by Public Assistance is to have more brothers and sisters, more of a family, than any of us here have. And you owe them your respect, for everyone should have respect for his family."

My words were a very feeble sort of compensation, which could in no way counteract twenty years of secret despair. And yet, the man recovered himself calmly, and the mood of the lunch, although now different, became friendly once more.

Free of his secret shame, the little fairground salesman took his first steps into a new world.

FIVE

THE EXPERIMENT IN THE CORNFIELD

It often happens that my wife and I wake up at the same time having both dreamed the same dream. I have also many times given people the answer to questions they were going to put before they asked them. How can one explain these things, except as the result of the long and sometimes painful training I have gone through? They are not common to all *kakos*, and the Gypsies are not the only people to know of their existence. Quite often, though, these powers are linked with others, such as the Look, and someone who has one of them may have the potential for others. One only needs the right teacher to bring them out.

In my case it was once more Hartiss who took charge of me. Here is an account of one of the many experiments we did together.

On August 18, 1942, we were in the Beauce region of France.

"Today we'll try it," Hartiss said.

"It's just foolishness," I replied.

"Try, anyway. Then you can see for yourself."

"If it works, it's just pure chance."

"And if we try every day this week and we succeed each time—will it still be just luck?"

"Why shouldn't chance repeat itself seven times over? I don't believe in magic."

"And you're right; magic only exists for those fools who won't admit the forces of nature. They can't

understand them. So they label them supernatural—when in fact nothing is more natural.”

All around us a field of sun-ripened corn rippled like a sea of gold. Hartiss’s black eyes took an intense expression he always wore when he wanted to convince me of something. He gave a little smile as he talked to me in his gentle, persuasive voice.

“My boy,” he said, “what we are going to attempt this afternoon can only succeed if there is love.”

“Love? What sort of love?”

“The love we feel for each other. Now, come . . .”

I got up from the ditch where I had been lying and looked out across the field of corn. It was a small field, an almost ridiculous little patch in the middle of the immense plain with, far away, like two masts of a ship, the spires of Chartres Cathedral.

“Alright, I’ll do it.”

“Then off with you, my boy.”

I left him there standing as still and solidly planted as a tree stump, and started out toward the side of the field. From that moment on I no longer seemed to be master of my own actions, and everything he told me to do I did.

“Walk slowly, breathe regularly, match your footsteps to your breathing. Empty your mind of all thought. Only absorb what is around you, nothing else. Don’t be in a hurry, take your time.”

I could sense his gaze on my back. I walked slowly as he had told me to do. I felt happy. At the corner of the field I turned and walked beside the hedge which bordered it on one side. There, where I could no longer feel his eyes on me, I began to feel my own master once again, and everything around me belonged to me. A feeling of happiness spread over me. I began to pick flowers, very slowly, here and there as the fancy took me. And as I did so I made my way toward the far corner of the field.

When I got there I knelt on one knee and put my bunch of wild flowers on the grass at my feet. Then I leaned forward and with one arm pushed aside the

heavy corn in front of me until I had made a little square patch, which I pushed down to form a rough, flat surface. My heart was beating fast. I had the impression that what I was going to do required an immense effort. And yet all I did was place the bunch of wild flowers on the sort of natural altar I had made. There were two cornflowers, three poppies, a spray of wild mustard, and five clover flowers.

I felt very pleased with myself. I got up slowly and saw, right across from me at the opposite corner of the field, the black hat of the old man, then his smiling face, and finally his waving arm.

“Come, my boy, come.”

I started to run. I ran as hard as I could toward him and found him perched on a slope. He put one hand on my shoulder and with the other pointed to a little square of flattened corn on which was placed two cornflowers, three poppies, a spray of wild mustard, and five clover flowers. My shoulders felt like lead. I sat down beside him. He said, “Do you really believe we would be as tired as this, you and I, if we hadn’t performed what idiots would call an act of sorcery, but which is really only a natural act? For tiredness is the natural result of any effort. One day, my boy, men will discover the source and the reason for what you and I have done today and others have done for centuries before us. It’s called thought transmission, I believe? I suppose at the other corner of the field you too put a bunch of the same wild flowers on a flattened square of corn.”

“Yes.”

“Which one of us was the transmitter?”

“I don’t know. I just picked them as I saw them.”

“And then?”

“Then I did what you told me to do. I cleared a little space in the corn and placed them there.”

“At that moment did you have any particular thought?”

“Yes, I wanted them to be pretty to look at—rather like a flower picture.”

"Then, my boy, it is you who transmitted and I who received. For only an artist in an experience like this is able to keep in touch with his driving force. You paint pictures. It is a sign of strength. So it was you."

He smiled then and said, "Some day or other it happens the pupil surpasses the master. It is a sign the teacher is a good one and the pupil attentive."

SIX

SLEEP AND DREAMS

I never heard Pitt Zolaroff call his mother anything else but "mama." It used to give me an odd feeling to hear this old man of ninety using this childish expression in his quavery voice. But when I talked of my own mother and he heard me call her "mother," a sad expression would come over his lined face. He said either I had forgotten my origins or been separated from them, because the word *mother* was to *mama* what *flic* was to *gendarme*, an insult.

Pitt was a magnetist. He used magnetism to cure the physical and psychological problems of women and children.

At that time I was employed by a decorating firm on boulevard Bineau in Neuilly on the outskirts of Paris. One day I found the owner, who had a large luxurious apartment on the premises, in tears. She was in such a state she obviously needed to confide in someone, even a workman in her employ, as I was then. She was desperate about her seven-year-old son, who had no appetite and was daily becoming

weaker and more apathetic. So far no doctor she had consulted had been able to find anything wrong with him.

I told her I knew of a healer who might be able to help her. She said she was willing to try anyone. Zolaroff agreed to see her on the condition that I went with her and her child to the appointment. This took place in a private room at a café on Paris's rue des Beaux Arts, where I was well-known. I left them alone.

Two hours later, Zolaroff, who was seventy-five at the time, emerged in a particularly joyful mood and we went out for a far from therapeutic night on the town. Later I learned from the woman how P  p   Zolaroff had discovered the root of her child's ailment.

"First of all he just sat and gazed at me intently and then at my son," she said. "Then he asked the boy to tell him about his dreams, especially those he dreamed over and over again. Surprised, I said nothing. But my son then started to talk to your old friend in a way he never has to me. He said, 'I dream I am asleep in a big armchair in front of my mother's dressing table, on which is standing a large white sheet of paper like a window. Mama comes into the room and draws on the paper a large boy who looks rather like me. She goes away, but the boy stays and plays with me and my little cat. After a while he says, "It's cold in here. It's too big." So I give him my woollen blanket Mama made for me, which is very warm and pretty. He puts it around his shoulder and says, "See you tomorrow, little brother." And then he disappears through the sheet of paper and I'm left alone with my cat. But I see him again often. And each morning when I wake and go up to Mama's attic workroom I find the blanket, which he has brought back to me in the night.'"

Two months after the appointment with Zolaroff the mother of the little boy told her son he was probably going to have a little brother. She was pregnant. The boy immediately began to take a re-

newed interest in life. He started to eat better, and his health improved. In fact it was a little sister who arrived instead of the expected brother, but the cure worked just the same.

Obviously a good psychiatrist might easily have made the same diagnosis of the boy's trouble, but it is nevertheless striking to find a Gypsy working along the same lines. Interpretation of dreams was one of Pépé's specialities, and he told me he had managed to effect cures much more spectacular than the one I knew about.

Anything which has to do with dreams or sleep has a very particular significance for the Gypsy seer. *Kakos* even believe—however remarkable this may seem—that dreams have healing powers. Hartiss and a few others had no difficulty in having prearranged dreams—dreaming about what they wanted to dream about. For this one should adopt a “dreaming position,” which makes the experience possible, or at least helps to bring it about. Then, relaxing completely, one mentally creates a landscape, either real or imaginary, in which one can walk as one falls asleep. The aim of this control of one's dreams is to redress the balance of the psyche, to eliminate the scars of fatigue and worry, and to establish a sort of diagnosis of one's own physical and mental health.

“For instance,” Hartiss used to say, “if you are dreaming of a bunch of flowers and the flowers fade just before you wake up—that's a sign that things are not quite all they should be.”

One can see that these theories have a certain affinity with psychosomatic medicine, which treats illness, even a physical disability, as the result of a deeper mental disturbance. This form of manipulation of dreams has now become almost a matter of course for me, because, after having received a certain amount of training from Hartiss, I can now share my wife's dreams.

As far as the *kako* is concerned, sleep is a source of power which helps him to renew his forces. Certainly

this is true for everybody, but the *kako* seems to gain special benefit from sleep, which is perhaps one of the reasons why the majority of *kakos* have extremely good health and great energy until an advanced age.

It is well known that Gypsies have always taken great account of certain natural phenomena, such as magnetic fields and electricity. Together with the position of the stars, these things rule their daily lives and also their sleep.

No matter in what spot he found himself, the old Gypsy Biglia, a tribal chief, would place his caravan facing a certain way. The rest of his family would wait until he had finished before placing theirs in the same direction. It often happened that the old man made his family and followers pull out of a place almost as soon as they had arrived if there wasn't what he felt to be a propitious atmosphere. And it was he, and he alone, who was the judge of this. It took me years to discover what his secret was. Sometimes the children of the tribe called him “the Source.”

Biglia always imposed the same kind of ceremony on his followers before they camped, and it never varied. I had occasion once to watch him in action. The whole troupe was drawn up by the roadside near the site of a municipal trash dump. With a gesture of his hand, the old man, who had headed the convoy for the last ten miles of the day, ordered me to stand back with the rest. I watched him walk to the edge of the dumping ground, where there was a large slag heap. Protruding through the clinker were bits of old iron, fruit boxes, and broken bottles. The smell was overpowering.

The old man looked at the sky, then pulled his watch from his pocket and with the edge of his shoe drew a line in the ground.

A young girl standing by me murmured, “Grandfather has found ‘the source.’” The old man came back, took his horse's bridle from my hands, and turned the animal so that the four wheels of his caravan lay in line with the mark he had made on

the soil. The four other trailers found their own spots, but finally all were placed facing in the same direction as the old man's caravan. I can remember thinking the whole performance was a magic tribal ritual intended to make the camping site a place of good omen.

Five months later I met Biglia's old companion Vannia in the place de la Contrescarpe on the Left Bank, where she kept a lace stall. As soon as she recognized me she got up and clutched at my arm. "Oh, if you only knew what has been going on since you left us! Biglia is in a terrible way. Nothing can make him take to the road, because he says he can no longer find the source. He changes the position of his caravan several times each night and hardly gets any sleep."

"I'll go and see Biglia, Vannia."

"When?"

"Tomorrow, if you like."

"Couldn't you go tonight?"

"Where are you?"

"In the park at Montreuil."

"Alright, I'll go tonight."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

That night Biglia greeted me like a long-lost friend. But behind the exuberant welcome I could see the old man was not himself and his hands trembled with anxiety. At that time he was seventy-six. When I had last seen him, he was alert and firm-jawed, but now his cheeks were sunken, and he looked his age. After we had drunk two cups of tea he finally decided to tell me all about his troubles.

"The children are no longer with me, Pierre," he said. "They went off toward Provence, and my brother Dinnah has taken them in. As for me, this is the only place I can manage to get a little sleep since I lost my diviner's powers to find the source."

I let the old man take his time without interrupting him. Biglia explained to me the great importance of

the positioning of the caravans for the night. Only when they were in the right position did a truly beneficial sleep descend on the camp.

"One night," he said, "just as we were about to camp, I found that I had lost my 'sleep watch.'"

"What sort of watch?"

"The one where the hands are fixed one over the other."

"I have never seen a watch with fixed hands."

"But yes, Pierre, it does exist—look!"

My old friend pulled out from under his bed an ancient calendar and showed me an illustration of an old compass.

Two days later I was back at the Montreuil park with a new compass for Biglia mounted on a bone penholder.

Three months later Biglia was in Italy. I never saw him again.

Biglia was not a learned man. He hadn't the knowledge of the *kakos* of his race. The compass was for him a magic object that enabled him to align his encampment with cosmic laws his ancestors had taught him gave good sleep.

SEVEN

FACIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND THE LINES OF THE HAND

It was a warm starlit night. We had all been sitting around a campfire. I hardly noticed the Gypsies slipping away out of the circle of firelight; but when I looked around, Hartiss and I were alone. He got up and walked toward one of the caravans drawn up by

the side of the road. I followed him. He didn't need to tap on the door; it opened as we got to the foot of the steps. The scene is imprinted on my memory: the caravan standing out in the moonlight and the old Gypsy Angela framed in the doorway, looking at me fixedly.

"Don't try to guess my age," she said. "I'm ageless." She burst into a cackle of laughter, and Hartiss gave me a gentle push up the caravan steps.

"So," she said, "this is the son who taught you how to read, Pietro, and to whom you are teaching the laws of the Romanies."

"Yes, Angela, here he is."

"And you want me to tell him my secrets?"

"Only if you think he deserves it."

"Well, he's your son, isn't he?"

"Yes, but I want you to be the judge."

"Very well. But let's go out in the moonlight before the moon meets 'the mother and her tribe.'" (This was the Gypsy name for Venus and her attendant stars.)

"Sit there," said Angela, pointing to an old tree stump. "Shut your eyes and hold out your hands toward me, palms upward, so that I can see the features of your face and the lines in your hands at the same time."

I did as she told me. A feeling of deep peace came over me, as though an unknown force made me fall back into the inner recesses of my very being. I could hear the sound of their breathing less than a step from me, and this enabled me to locate their position. They seemed to be almost in front of me, and it seemed as if their faces must be very close together. The palms of my hands became moist. The breath of Angela and Hartiss felt like a fan running over them.

The old woman then said, "Yes, he is as you described him to me. Nothing can make him change what he has decided to do."

"He knows how to keep his own counsel, doesn't he, Angela?"

"Yes, contempt or meanness cannot touch him. He knows how to keep his temper."

"He's been sitting there quite a long while, Angela."

"Very well, he can open his eyes now."

I opened my eyes. I looked at the two of them incredulously. Both of them were bareheaded. The old woman had taken off the silk headscarf in which her hair had been imprisoned; it now fell down over her shoulders like a curtain. As for Hartiss, he was holding his hat in his hand, smiling at me. It was the first time in ten years I had seen him bareheaded, except when he was asleep. It was as though a Moslem had gone into a mosque with his shoes on, an Orthodox Jew attended synagogue without his yarmulke, a bishop entered a cathedral without his crosier, or the women of a harem walked unveiled in the street. For Angela to uncover her head in front of me, a gorgio, was to cut me off from my people so that I could enter this unknown and secret universe.

It was a warm night, and Angela's voice was soft and murmuring as she said, "So you fully understand, we must change places. And we must act quickly before the moon gets any higher in the sky."

A few seconds later, Angela and Hartiss were sitting where I had been, their eyes shut, their hands extended palms upward. Suddenly I felt a wonderfully soothing feeling of well-being, of harmony and inner peace. In complete silence they were projecting their inner consciousness toward me. I felt mysteriously encircled by an energy I could not identify. I had already been initiated into the fire ritual. That had been a painful experience in which one had to vanquish pain in order to succeed. But this experience was accomplished with serenity.

As she opened her eyes, Angela said, "If you have looked into us as we have looked into you, your father should be a happy man."

"My father has no idea what has become of me."

"I was speaking of this father," she said, indicating

Hartiss with her head as she tied her hair up again with her scarf.

"Pierre is right, Angela," said Hartiss. "One should never forget the father who has given one life. Even if later on the road of life one meets a second father who gives one the breath of life. Without the first, the second could not exist."

A little while later, water was simmering in the samovar for tea.

"I never do a hand reading unless I have studied the face first," said Angela as she prepared the cups. "The first reading, that of the face, opens the gate to the second. So you will understand, I'll give you the secret of the lines of a face. I shall not teach you how to read the lines of a hand, because that is something only done by a woman."

So old Angela explained to me her methods of facial reading. It is only gorgios who believe that Gypsy sorcerers and sorceresses proceed by analysis. As is the case in "vision in movement" (see Chapter 10), their deductions are almost always based on instinct and intuition, but on a natural instinct which the vast majority of men have now lost and place in the realm of the supernatural.

The deep reading Angela taught me can in no way be affected by any artificial expressions on the face used to deliberately mislead the reader. The contradiction between the expression and the lines of the face is immediately visible. There are several ways of reading a face. One can, as Angela and Hartiss did with me, project oneself psychically into the other person, make contact with his soul, and, as it were, take its weight. Then there is a relatively external approach, for the features of a face—not the expression of the moment but what lies beneath and gives a face its character—are eloquent.

But this cannot be done at just any time. For instance, reading the face of a person who is asleep is completely misleading, as it is the subconscious which comes to the surface then and transforms the features,

so that the sleeping person often has very little in common with the same person when awake. It would be rash to judge someone by his subconscious. On the other hand, reading the face of someone who is fully awake but who has his eyes shut has many advantages. The face seems to take on a deeper expressiveness when the glance is absent and one's attention is not distracted by the expression of the eyes. The face can then become like an open book for someone who knows how to read it. The events and problems of the past, the present, and very often the future are all written there.

These facial readings Angela would then compare with the lines of the hands. As she studied a hand she would press it, kneading it gently so as to come into contact with the "fluid" of the person concerned. So great was the effort involved in a character reading that sometimes she would have to spend the entire next day in bed to recover.

EIGHT

THE FIRE MASTERS

Suddenly there was the shrill scream of a wounded animal. Everyone in the Gypsy encampment stood rooted to the spot. Then came a second cry, this one human, a child's strident yell blending with the yelps of the animal. This was quickly followed by the anguished shriek of a woman crying her child's name: "Galina! Galina!"

Standing near the overturned cauldron which a few minutes earlier had been full of boiling clothes, little

Galina held out her arms in front of her, her feet covered with the scalding water. By her side her little dog, Turco, writhed with pain, then ran off as fast as it could, howling as it went. Someone shouted, "To the Durance," and a young boy, quickly picking up two wooden bowls, ran as hard as he could toward the river. A man lifted Galina from beneath her armpits. She was only five years old, and her body turned and twisted with pain as he held her. Her feet, burned bright red by the boiling water, were held clear of the ground by the man, whom I then recognized as her father.

Two old women were blowing on her feet, murmuring unintelligible words. Their fingers, held over her, were inscribing geometrical symbols in the air.

"Bring the clay," cried the same voice which had shouted, "To the Durance." A woman ran to the back of a caravan, dislodged a chicken coop, and pulled out an old patched flour sack, which she dragged along the ground toward the burned child. Untying the string which fastened it, she poured out a thick yellow powder into a large china bowl. The boy had by then returned from the river, the two wooden bowls brimming with water. Some of this he poured onto the powder while another man mixed it with his hands until a heavy clay dripped from his fingers.

"That's right now," said one of the old women who was blowing on Galina's feet.

The father then held the child over the bowl. The contrast between the man, a fairground wrestler, and the little girl gave the whole scene an air of touching unreality. He gently lowered the girl's burned feet into the cold, wet clay. Everyone around him stood still. The two old women each held one of the girl's hands.

Was it medicine? Or magic? I could find no answer. A man touched me on the shoulder and said, "Tomorrow Galina will be able to dance."

Then from the shadows came the notes of a guitar. It was Giuseppe softly strumming a marching song to match the movements of the little girl's feet as she

trod the clay, supported by the two old women. All signs of pain and tears had disappeared from her face, and her large black eyes were fixed on the guitar player. Beads of sweat rolled down her forehead. As for the two women, they were sweating so hard that streams of water were making clean lines on their grimy faces. At one point one of them dipped a finger in the clay and called for it to be changed. Out of curiosity I put my finger in the used clay that was thrown out on the ground. It was warm.

Three days later, Galina was walking and skipping around without a mark on her bare feet.

Medicine or magic? Probably a mixture of the two. After Galina's cure, the two old women who had breathed on her feet and held her hands stayed shut up for three days in their caravans and later emerged looking thinner and tired, undoubtedly a case of cause and effect.

I mentioned earlier that the clay in the bowl became warm. There was perhaps a natural explanation; after all, the two old women had been pouring sweat. However, they had only been holding the hands of the little girl. The musician had stared into the girl's eyes, and she had stared back at him. But why did there have to be music at all? Why the rhythm which kept time with the movement of the child's feet? And why had the whole tribe formed a circle around the musician, the old women, and the little girl? Many questions with no answers.

It would be wrong to imagine Gypsy tribes rely solely on old wives' cures and treatments handed down from their ancestors. While they will try to relieve an inflamed appendix with a poultice of clay or peat, they nevertheless do take their sick to hospitals for medical advice or surgery.

Side by side with our orthodox medicine there exists a parallel power of healing. It is not my intention here to take sides with one against the other, but simply to demonstrate that both do exist.

As far as the Gypsies are concerned, the gift of

healing is not necessarily hereditary as it is with some non-Gypsy village healers.

The following story, which was told to me by the writer Blaise Cendrars, does shed a little light on the mystery of how the man who has the healing power is discovered and becomes the "doctor" of the tribe.

"One day," said Blaise, "all the children in the camp had gone out mushroom gathering and returned with baskets full. An old woman spread out a ground sheet and emptied the whole lot onto it. Two little children, perhaps four or five years old, were then called, and both knelt down on the tarpaulin and proceeded to sort out the mushrooms one by one and put them back in the baskets. When they had finished, a little heap of mushrooms remained in the center of the sheet. This little pile spelled death. I don't know how to explain it, but as we use pigs to root out truffles, the Gypsies use very young children without any knowledge or experience who pick out by instinct the poisonous mushrooms from the edible ones."

It is after tests such as these that a child is singled out and trained by a healer. For it was the healer who placed the deadly mushrooms among the others for just this purpose.

Gypsies call poisoning "stomach fire," and certain menstrual pains their healers treat are called "tears of fire." Migraine headaches, sunburn, stomach ache, stomach ulcers, any pain which gives a burning sensation, can be calmed by the healer who is a "Fire Master." It is not a question of curing any of these complaints themselves, but of curing pain, of using magnetism as an analgesic. Violent appendicitis pains can be soothed and absorbed in this way, so that the patient can be transported to a hospital more easily. The procedure has nothing in common with hypnosis. It is, in my opinion, closely related to forms of magnetic therapy.

At that time I didn't realize that several years later I would myself become a healer and a Fire Master. The Gypsies considered my natural gifts in this direc-

tion were sufficient after I had successfully passed a certain test. After that test—which I shall describe—I had to go through a long and strange apprenticeship.

I was working for a circus, and Hartiss used occasionally to drop in unannounced to see me. The old man arrived one night and slept on a pile of straw. At five the following morning—it was March 18, 1944—he was standing at the foot of my bed waiting for me to wake up. It was the snorting of the horses which finally awakened me. We drank some horrible-tasting ersatz coffee which we prepared in a soldier's canteen heated over some tablets of solid alcohol. When Hartiss thought his coffee was warm enough, he took up the burning tablet in his hands and crushed it in his palms, the little blue flames licking through his fingers until it went out.

I looked at him in astonishment. "You haven't burned yourself?"

For answer he showed me the palm of his hand, which was completely unmarked. Then he sat down on the edge of my bed and said, "Do you cure burns?"

"Yes."

"So do I. But do you know *how* you cure burns?"

"No."

"Well, I know, and I want you to know too. This is the main reason why I have come to see you today. For today is the anniversary of the death of a famous sorcerer, a renowned 'Traveler,' who a great many years ago was burned alive in a Paris square where I am going to take you now."

"Oh, those sorts of tales are just legends from the past," I said.

"Pierre, legends, as you call them, all start with a grain of truth, a beginning which changes as the years go by. Do you know that at the time that man was burned all of France was covered with pyres on which sorcerers and witches were put to death? In those days the brothers of my race were acrobats, jugglers, tightrope walkers. They practiced palmistry

and fortune-telling. But none of these fires consumed the body of a single Gypsy."

"Oh, come on, you old sorcerer," I said, giving him a friendly pat on the shoulder. "At that time you would have been burned to a crisp. And as you have a lot of flesh on you, you would have fed the flames well."

"I swear to you, Pierre, I speak the truth. With us, our word is sacred. It is not written in books, therefore it is never deformed. Nothing should be deformed, for wisdom cannot be nourished with lies. I can swear to you that in the Middle Ages not one of my brother Gypsies was burned as a sorcerer."

It wasn't until twenty-five years later that I met Monsieur Vaux de Folletier, one of the best Romany scholars of the present time. He declared after having studied all the French archives on the subject, particularly the records from Lorraine, that he never found any record among the witchcraft trials of a single Gypsy having been burned at the stake for witchcraft. So the truth had survived orally for nearly four centuries.

Anyway, on that March day in 1944, Hartiss and I were walking slowly through Les Halles, the Paris markets, picking our way through piles of vegetables. Near rue de Rivoli a convoy of German tanks was making its way in the direction of la place de la Concorde. Hartiss, putting his hand on my shoulder, said, "We are not very far from the place I spoke to you about. If you are what I think you are, something will happen there which you will think very strange. But remember this: as soon as you are actually on the spot, don't speak to anyone you meet, even if you think you know them."

By then we were crossing the Pont-Neuf over the Seine. Behind the statue of Henry IV a double flight of steps leads down to the terrace which overlooks the square du Vert Galant, a small grass enclosure flanked by the Seine. Leaning over the balustrade, we gazed down at this small triangle of green. A tall

tree overshadowed the terrace where we were standing.

"There," announced Hartiss. He pointed toward the park keeper's little wooden shelter. "That's where the stake was raised. Even when the Seine floods, it never covers the spot where the pyre was." On this exact spot in 1314 the Grand Master of the Templars, Jacques de Molay, and his companions were burned alive by order of the King of France, Philippe le Bel. From amid the flames the Templar is supposed to have cursed his sovereign and all his descendants.

"Gypsies only appeared in France a century later. But the story was passed down by word of mouth, and the dramatic end of the cursed kings was added to it. Later, Fire Masters claimed Jacques de Molay for one of their own. At the instigation of the Travelers of France, the spot on which the execution took place has since become a secret meeting place for the Gypsy Fire Masters."

Hartiss's manner seemed to me a little odd. He appeared to be looking around for something or someone.

"Come, my son," he said, pushing me toward one of the flights of steps.

On the rare occasions when Hartiss called me "son" I always knew I was about to experience something new or learn something strange. We were now walking side by side, following the pathway which led around the grass plot of the little square. Other strollers were either walking in the same direction or facing us coming the other way. At that moment a man passed me walking in front of the park keeper's hut. Our eyes met. It seemed to me I knew him. He nodded to me and I did the same. After I had passed him it struck me I had never seen him before in my life, yet there was something familiar about him.

At my side Hartiss said nothing, but continued walking at a steady pace. Once more we circled the square. Then, as we were approaching one of

the archways of the bridge, underneath which there was a flight of steps, I had the same sensation as before. An old man and a young man were coming toward us. Hartiss took my hand at the same moment as the old man facing us took the hand of the young man by his side. We all nodded to each other without a word.

When we were once again in front of the statue of Henry IV, I stopped and breathed deeply. Hartiss waited until I had collected myself. I said to him, "My hands are burning."

"You don't think I would have brought you all the way here for nothing, my son," he answered. "My hands are like ice."

As his hands grasped mine, I felt the heat recede from them in burning waves. Walking along together side by side we must have looked like two drunks, father and son, returning home to sleep it off.

Once back at the circus I asked him, "Why did you take me there?"

"If you had been a billiard player I would have taken you to a poolroom on the day I knew champion players were going to be there so you could learn something from them. But you wouldn't have been able to pick out those champion players if they had been lost in a crowd.

"But today you recognized men you had never met before, and those men recognized you. It is a sign you possess the same kind of special perception we have. Beginning today I shall teach you how to control real fire. When you have achieved this successfully, you will then be able to conquer not only burns which occur on the skin but also others, such as those that affect women and their wombs. For it is there that the mystery of life has its beginning. The man, Pierre, who has in him the powers we have, must learn to give."

In the winter of that year Alexandre Bouglione gave me a job working in the circus heating unit,

and I had as a mate a former merchant navy engineer Gerard M., who today is the captain of an ocean liner. In the circus world Gerard was for me a haven of strength and quietness. Like me, this Breton was being hidden from the Gestapo by Alexandre Bouglione.

Gerard had a grandmother who was able to heal burns. He told me about her one day after he had watched me picking out from the burning coke the "black nuggets," the little bits of coal the fire had not caught. The day before he had had a bit too much to drink and had called me a sorcerer. He apologized the following day and told me his grandmother was a "mistress of fire" and could light a fire by carrying hot coals in her bare hands from one fire to another. After hearing about this feat I felt my own efforts hardly counted.

Then one day Hartiss offered me one of the little black Italian cigars he liked to smoke and said, "If you can put out what I am about to light, then I'll teach you something else." Raking around among the burning cinders, he took out a small piece of red-hot coal and lighted his cigar with it.

As he drew on it in little short puffs, Gerard, who was sitting at the back of the forge on an upturned gasoline can smoking another of the same little black cigars, looked from one to the other of us with an odd smile on his face.

"Now put it out," said Hartiss, suddenly handing me the cigar. "Put it out just as I lighted it."

I looked at the red-hot tip of the cigar and wondered how on earth I was going to be able to put it out.

"Like this," declared Gerard abruptly, taking hold of his own cigar by the lighted end, putting it out with one strong pinch of his fingers. Then getting up and coming toward us, he showed me the thumb and index fingers of his right hand. Not a mark!

From Hartiss's smile as he looked on, I realized

Gerard's presence beside me in the boiler room was no accident. Once again the old man had managed to arrange for his "son" to come under the guidance of another master, without my being aware of it.

"Now," he said, pulling on his cigar again to make the tip red-hot. "Try now, but think hard about what you are doing."

A few seconds later I had managed it, something I would have thought impossible six months previously.

"What you have just done, Pierre," said Hartiss, "is nothing when you think some African sorcerers can walk on white-hot coals. But this particular test is designed to lead you on to more difficult things."

I looked in amazement at my thumb and index finger. There was no trace of a burn, nor did I feel any burning sensation. All I felt was a kind of inner uneasiness, which Hartiss certainly realized, for he declared, "This little achievement of yours, Pierre, is as nothing to what Jacques De Molay did the day Philippe le Bel ordered him to be burned alive at the place we visited last spring. I have only known his real name for a short time, and I would probably never have known it if you hadn't taught me to read."

"Well, then, what name do you know him by?"

"The Master of Fire."

"Why 'Master'?"

"Because throughout the duration of his agony he never ceased to speak like a man who felt no pain. Moreover, he made predictions to his executioner, for fire is a source of divination and makes apparent what will only have existence in the future."

THE TRANCE OF THE FIRE

It was not until very much later I had a chance of learning something about divination by fire. I am, I believe, one of the few people privileged to have taken part in a "trance of the fire" (a kind of thought

reading through flames), and there are many Gypsies who have never done so.

The whole thing was probably staged for my benefit, as the man who did it spoke his incantation in French throughout instead of the ancient Romany language in which it is usually uttered. What a strange sight that trance was, with all the men sitting around the campfire forming a ring with their arms linked together.

These are more or less the words of old Grinisto, the grandfather of Lovenita of the Krünger tribe, as he spoke into the fire.

"You are cold, my brothers,

So look

These are the tufts of hair,
the head of flax that is crushed.

The dead plant
is sometimes flame,
for that which warms
comes from fire.

You are cold, my brothers,

So look

at the tail of the peacock
reaching out to the sun.
It's the arse of your old cauldron, Arno.
Listen to the sound of the pewter singing
and blow on its ugly face.

You are cold, my, brothers,

So look

how the belly of Romi moves.
you hear me, Arno,
the belly of Romi
is like the arse of your cauldron.
You hear me, Arno—
full of fire,
of sun,
of life."

Is it only a coincidence that one year later Arno was christening a new addition to his family at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer? The baby was three months old.

Those words thrown out into the wind and smoke were not said casually, and no doubt Arno took them to heart.

MY FIRST PALM HEALING

One day the siren on the construction site sounded twice. That meant an accident inside the unfinished block of buildings. I thought I heard my name being called—"Manouche, Manouche!" Catching hold of the cable hanging in the elevator cage, I slid down the shaft.

From below, a construction worker called Mangain rushed toward me. "Manouche, Mario has scalded his leg!"

"How?"

"A barrel of tar fell over it."

"My God!"

I ran after him across the site, which sloped down toward avenue de Saint-Ouen. I jumped over the rails of a crane and on past the hut housing the central heating installation.

"Quick, in the foreman's hut," cried Saïd, who had run to meet me. "His leg's steaming hot. From his knee to his foot is nothing but a mass of tar."

"I can't bear it, Manouche," said Mario. "Do something for me." The sweat was pouring down his face, and he moaned softly.

"Hold him by the shoulders," I said. "And get me a knife."

Gerard and Morissot lifted his shoulders. "Get me a crate," I ordered.

Mario yelled as Saïd helped him to sit on the crate.

"Saïd, get another crate to support his leg at the top," I said. "Or rather, hold up the leg yourself."

I cut off his trousers below the knee with a sharp knife. The tar had not gone through the cloth, but the

calf was as red and raw as a piece of uncooked meat. It had, however, completely soaked through his shoe. I cut along the laces and the top of the shoe and got it off. The tar had stuck his sock to his foot. I managed to get the blade inside the sock and cut it off.

Mario was howling with the pain.

"It's going to get tougher," I told him. "Try not to move too much."

"Hurry up," he said. "For the love of God, hurry up!"

For the first time in my life I used the palms of my hands to heal. I felt instinctively that my first and second fingers outstretched would not be enough. I didn't touch the leg. I held my hands around it and waited for the healing fluid to start working.

The pain should start to diminish and then fade away to almost nothing. Mario continued to yell, then moaned, and finally was quiet. My hands were burning with intense pain; sweat was rolling down my face, and my shirt stuck to my back.

Suddenly, Mario's voice was saying, "Alright, Manouche, you needn't go on any more." I lifted my head and my eyes met those of the foreman of the scaffolding construction. And I realized that I had been successful. I read in those eyes incredulity, wonder, and fear. And yet, everything seemed to me so simple.

My hands were still burning as I heard the siren of the ambulance.

"I'd like a cigarette," said Mario as he was lifted onto the stretcher. The stretcher-bearer gave me an odd look, and then they were gone.

I was alone—lost among an excited crowd of workmen, who slapped me on the back, saying, "But, Manouche, how do you do it?"

The answer was always the same: "I don't know."

And it's true. I don't know. I just sense what has to be done. For when I heal, I feel the pain fleeing from me like game before the hunter. I can't explain it, but I know that at the moment of victory I am no more

than one of the cogs in a great process of the universe. There are things I have to undergo. Once these things are achieved, I feel a great sense of well-being—well-being and exhaustion.

LIGHTING THE RITUAL FIRE

The Gypsies had taught me how to brave fire, then how to cure burns and calm the pain they caused. But I realized what in fact they had done was to develop certain latent resources within me that I had been born with. They had recognized I had certain gifts, and Hartiss, out of friendship and gratitude, had taken over the task of bringing these powers to light and teaching me how to use them. However, I was not shown everything, for the complete subjugation of fire also includes control of steam and combustion.

Then one day quite by chance a Romany called Georgio taught me how a Fire Master lights a ritual fire. This special fire is absolutely essential for certain ceremonies and magic rites.

"A ritual fire comes from nature," Georgio told me. "You must respect it as you respect the life of your mother, for she also comes from nature.

"The fire comes always from the sky above you, in the same way lightning falls on you from above or the sun shines on you from on high. Lightning strikes by chance on a single spot. The sun spreads its rays over the whole earth. Lightning brings a fire of misfortune, because it has no intelligence. But the sun guided by man gives a good fire if you make it with its opposite—water. For the fire of my ancestors sprang from sun and water."

I gazed at him as he stood facing the sun. He was now silent and still, a huge figure of a man, a fair-ground Hercules standing beside the slow-moving river Loire.

"We shall not eat if water does not make the fire," he announced suddenly.

It was his way of explaining things. Of all the out-

standing men I encountered among the Gypsies, Georgio was an exception, a happy odd man out. He had no sage formulas to propound, but threw words out like hammer blows. I wondered how much longer our paths would run side by side. Three months of shared work at a lime kiln had helped me to know the man.

"If the fire burns your kisser, show it your ass," he shouted one day when a tongue of flame shot out of the kiln and threw me back against the outer wall.

Rejected by his tribe for a reason I neither knew nor questioned him about, he spent six months on the road with me. They were a fantastic six months, for he lived by instinct like a true lone wolf.

We were now standing together by the Loire, and Georgio made a fire with the sun's rays, a freshly cut nasturtium leaf, a straw stalk, a handful of oat husks, dry chestnut leaves, and a tin mug of water taken from the river.

Five days earlier he had burned his hand while removing a roasted pheasant from an improvised spit, and I had cured the burn for him. Since then our friendship had deepened.

Now he turned to me and said, "So I'm going to show you one of the three ways our forefathers used to light fires for weddings, christenings, and funerals. I'm going to show you because it's something you need to know. But also I owe it to you in return for what you did for me. You gave me the cool fluid which cured the burning."

I watched him incredulously as he set to work. First he dug a little hole in the sand of the riverbank. Then he made a cone of chestnut leaves, which he placed in the hole, point downward. After having propped the cone upright in the hole with a few little stones to hold it away from the sand, he then put the oat chaff into it. Taking the piece of straw, he cut out a straight section which formed an open tube and placed the remaining pieces between the stones. Then he took hold of the nasturtium leaf and, using the claw of a

black panther, which hung on a chain around his neck, made a small hole in it. He then placed the leaf gently so that it covered the upturned base of the cone.

A few moments later I watched the miracle. Using the reed of straw like a pipette, he drew up a little water from the tin can and then blew two drops from it gently onto the nasturtium leaf. Sliding over the smooth surface of the leaf, the water drop kept its shape like mercury on a flat surface. With the end of the straw, Georgio gently pushed the drop toward the hole in the leaf, shading it as he did so with his hand. The water remained suspended over the hole without falling through. Georgio then took his hand away. The sun's heating power shining on the drop of water as if on a lens was thus intensified tenfold. From time to time Georgio added another drop of water to reinforce the first, for evaporation could quickly have dried this fragile instrument.

Then suddenly there was a thread of smoke. It rose up in a straight blue line into our faces as we crouched over the leaf. With his thumb Georgio continued to let the drops slide over the leaf with the regularity of a metronome. The smoke was now rising from among the folded chestnut leaves. Using his tiny reed of straw like a miniature bellows, Georgio blew down on the smoking leaves until out shot a small tongue of flame.

I'll always remember his smile as he turned toward me and said, "I give you this fire, brother. It is yours."

I built it up and roasted quartered pieces of rabbit which I had previously rubbed with garlic and herbs. Then, rolled in my blanket and leaning back against the old car which served us as a caravan, I watched the fire slowly die down as if I were watching the death of a friend.

In the morning the circle of embers was still warm. Georgio threw a few shovelfuls of sand on it in silence. Then, as he was putting his spade back into the car, he said, "You must always cover your traces, Pierre."

The wolf was using the language of the fox. It's a hard apprenticeship—the rolling road!

NINE

MAGNETISM

Initiated into the mastery of fire, I was now a healer, a magnetist. My way of "palming," or healing with my hands, was at first instinctive. Over the years I learned to distinguish between various techniques. With practice I discovered certain rules and disciplines unknown to scientists, but for which my Gypsy teachers always had explanations, generally of a symbolic nature. Once applied, their teachings proved remarkably effective. The human body had no secrets for them, and their diagnoses were always precise and conclusive.

Whenever I managed to ease the physical pain of another person I recalled the words of Pietro Hartiss and of old Pitt Zolaroff the day they showed me certain magnetic passes.

"Your hands, my son, are like the sun and the moon," Pietro explained. "Like a flame and a mirror continually searching for each other. As soon as their paths cross, they fall apart once more, then reunite again. The obstacle which separates them is the earth, which comes under the influence of the two astral bodies. Without the moon there would be no tides, and without the sun no heat. If you place a human body between your two hands, this body will submit to the influence of your hands in the same way the earth is affected by the sun and the moon.

"The human body also possesses its own mountains,

streams, and oceans, governed by forces which transcend them. It will therefore submit to the stabilizing influence of your hands operating like two opposing poles moving to a continual set rhythm. Your hands should move around your body like the moon around the earth, and the earth around the sun, imitating the impulse of life itself."

Technically, this is how it works. Those Gypsies in the know recommend two ways of transmitting the vibrations of a magnetist—each complementary to the other. Palming consists of imposing the palms of the hands on certain parts of the patient's body. When the magnetist uses only the tips of his fingers, it is called the "claw touch." Palming and the claw become alternately the sun and the moon; one is not used without the other.

The fingers taken separately are, each in turn, symbols of the astral bodies.

The thumb corresponds to the sun. The index, or first, finger corresponds to the first quarter of the moon. The third finger represents the full moon. The fourth is the waning moon. The little finger is Venus.

Before starting to ease the pain of his patient or attempting a cure, the Gypsy magnetist usually makes one or two passes intended to tranquilize him. These passes condition the patient and put him in the right frame of mind to receive the treatment, for the Gypsy doesn't pretend to get to the source of the pain with the first session.

For a tranquilizing pass on the head, the fingers are placed on the back of the skull and then press into the scalp, moving rhythmically with the breathing of the magnetist, while the two thumbs rotate gently on the temples. The patient has his eyes closed, and each breath the magnetist exhales brushes across them. This method, taught by old Pitt, eliminates for a start headaches and migraines. I use it frequently as a starting point for treating sunburn and surface skin burns. Then follows the operation of palming, using both hands. This is intensified with a stronger pressure of

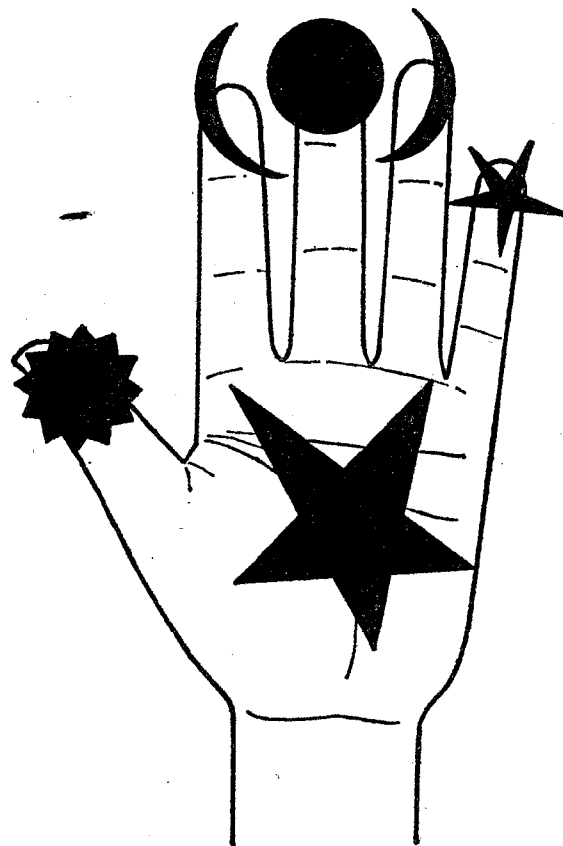


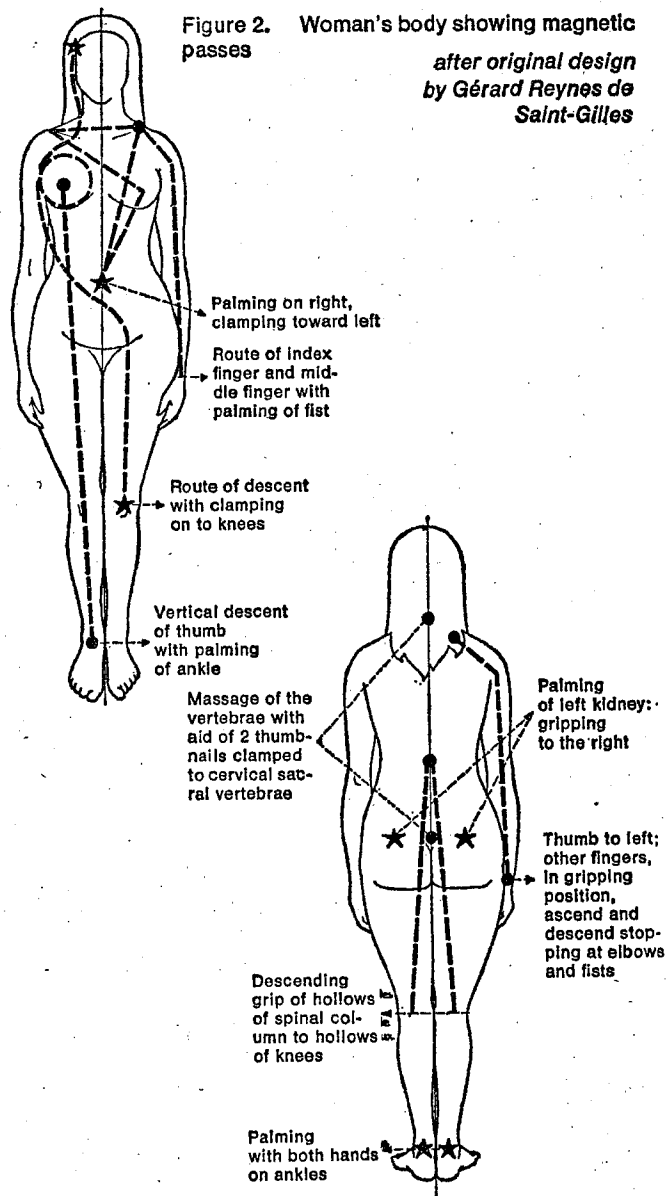
Figure 1. The hand

the thumb and the little finger, in other words the use of the "sun" and the "moon."

For magnetic passes covering the entire body, the patient stands upright while the Gypsy healer runs his hands all over the skin (fig. 2). Palming is marked with a star, the claw touch with a circle. The design shows the direction taken by the first and third fingers from the right breast (claw) to the left knee (palm-

Figure 2. Woman's body showing magnetic passes

*after original design
by Gérard Reynès de
Saint-Gilles*



ing) or a line taken by the thumb, starting from the same breast in a vertical line to the ankle, also treated by palming.

The placing of a hand on one side of the body always has a corresponding pressure on the other. A palming of the stomach, for example, by one hand has a corresponding claw touch on the kidneys.

The special passes shown on the diagrams are designed to reestablish the sexual equilibrium of the body. They work directly on the spinal cord, particularly on the sacral and cervical vertebrae, the mammary glands, the ovaries, and the whole genital system. They calm down certain excesses, usually hysterical, and normalize the sexual appetite. When used on a well-balanced person, these particular passes over the spinal column create a feeling of euphoria similar to that produced by a drug.

According to Pitt Zolaroff, a magnetist's body is ideally designed to fit inside a five-pointed star, rather like the celebrated design of Leonardo da Vinci (fig. 3). Each extremity of the star corresponds not only to a part of the human body but also to a particular astral body. Thus the head represents the sun, the sex the full moon, and the two hands the waxing and the waning moon. For the purposes of magnetism, the two legs are called the "bridge of life." These are more or less considered a symbolic extension of the testicles, "center of spreading vigor" and the "jewel case of life." It is easy to grasp the operative importance of the healer's head, its essential function as a "sundial," and the hands as the instruments of palming. The role of the sex is, however, more unusual.

Right at the beginning of my apprenticeship, Hartiss explained to me that in order to develop properly, the magnetic flow should never be braked or short-circuited by the emotions or by sexual activity. In other words, to reach the summit of his powers, the Gypsy magnetist has to submit to a form of ascet-

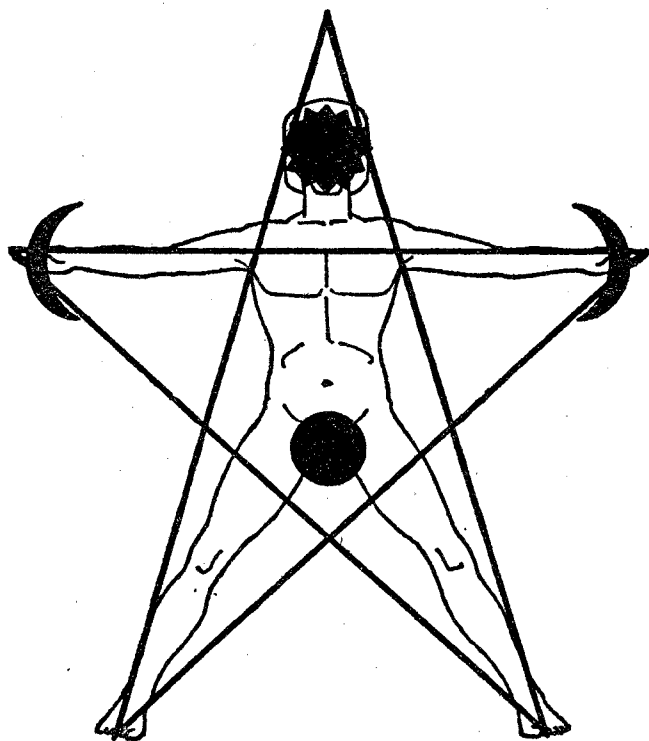


Figure 3. Man

icism designed to temporarily lull his sexual desires.

"The magnetist's power calms more than it cures," said Hartiss. "His power to ease pain diminishes if he lets his mind wander when he should be concentrating. The first thing you have to overcome, Pierre, is woman. The great majority of your patients will be women, for a magnetist can very often only exercise his power over persons of the opposite sex. It's an inexplicable law of nature. Sometimes you won't be very effective. At other times, on the contrary, you will prove to be a godsend.

"But in order to guard your healing faculties you

must be able to kill your male instincts when you have in front of you a patient who is both beautiful and desirable. Keep a special watch on the back-lash. You already know a magnetist can only be really effective if he works with complete concentration derived from regular breathing and a steady heart-beat. Now, certain passes across a woman's face can sometimes put her in a state of euphoria where she becomes sexually aggressive. You must learn how to resist all kinds of advances and to concentrate utterly on your work. It will be your only chance of success."

Hartiss told me at one time there were magnetists who could control their sexual desires to such a point they had to resort to special yoga exercises to recover their virility. At these moments their sperm became "nourishment," and the woman who swallowed it was able to digest within her body the essential magnetism of the donor. Women healers worked in a similar way by pressing their patients—who were often children—against their femininity. Hartiss had himself experienced this uncommon transmission of magnetism by means of a body fluid.

"Three times in my life I have given blood to people who have the same group as myself," he said. "And each time my hands no longer had any healing effect on their bodies. Because they were carrying my blood within them, they seemed to be immunized against my magnetism. I know, my son, this is just the sort of thing that makes people snicker. Those who are less ignorant know that what my ancestors practiced exists also in India, Africa, and China. Don't forget we are nomads, and everything we know comes from traveling."

Plate 3 shows the hand of an eleven-year-old magnetist demonstrating the claw touch. The Gypsies recognize future magnetists from certain malformations of the right hand. Such hands are said to be "dressed." This predisposition shows itself, too, in children who are adept at catching flies "in slow motion"—that is, plucking them from the air like

picking flowers. The insect is, it seems, sensitive to the emanations of the child's body. Then, when the child reaches puberty, the latent power of the healer either develops or disappears forever.

The Gypsy magnetists develop their tactile skill by practicing on nonhuman subjects such as the medieval bust shown in the photograph. This head is hollow and contains living or organic matter (hairs, horns) with which a subtle contact can be established. The old *kakos* practiced in this way on caskets containing human relics. This curious practice is not unconnected with the talismanic science of the Gypsies, which I shall discuss in Chapter 13. Human magnetism can also be captured by clay or peat, which play a dominant role in the fabrication of exorcists' masks, called "masks of serenity."

THE BACKLASH

There is another phenomenon of this kind that seems to obey laws which are still mysterious. By this I mean the backlash, the whole ensemble of happenings, often unexpected ones, provoked by the intervention of a *kako*. This includes incongruous reactions of the patient, but above all the inner upheaval of the sorcerer. He has to be a man of solid constitution, for the fallout of his intervention can have a disastrous impact on his health, perhaps even on his psychic equilibrium. It is very true that one does not summon unscathed the forces which outstrip our comprehension, even though they obey natural laws. It is not inappropriate here to draw a comparison with the Catholic exorcists of the past who, exhausted by their special ministry, barely managed to live beyond their thirty-fifth year.

"A real magnetist is not a grocer," Little Pierre told me once in Arles. "He should never sell the gift that comes to him from nature, nor should he give it away parsimoniously. But he should know when to stop before his source dries up. When you walk in

strawberry beds, you only pick strawberries. You pass over the flower, because it will yield the fruit of tomorrow. Never go beyond your powers. Because the child who stays too long at his mother's breast often exhausts the life of the one who gave him life."

The backlash shows itself generally in an extreme lassitude, a feeling of emptiness, of despair, the result both of an exhausting concentration and of the gift, the emission of magnetic fluid. I have seen Hartiss take to his bed for several days when all he had done was calm the pain of a man who had been kicked by a horse. I find it takes me three or four hours to recuperate after having managed successfully a mask of serenity. You can imagine I have great difficulty in taking seriously gorgio healers who boast of receiving—for hard cash—between twenty and one hundred patients a day. To keep up that pace one must have an almost superhuman endurance!

There is, however, one way of shielding oneself against the reaction after a magnetic treatment, and the Gypsies use it often without even knowing why. The reader will remember the cure of little Galina at the beginning of the previous chapter. The child, her burned feet wrapped in clay, was nursed by two old women while the rest of the tribe surrounded her, forming a sort of protective circle. Among all the people I have treated in my time, only the Gypsies have spared me the painful backlash. Strangely, the Gypsy patient never comes to see me alone. He is always accompanied by a friend or by several members of his family. A child is treated on the knees of its mother, surrounded by brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins. It may be that this family gathering has a "compensatory" function. This collection of diffuse forces around the healer seems to dilute or dam up the fallout. I can't explain why, but I usually feel no physical weakness after a treatment under these conditions.

"The tribe is to the child what the shell is to the egg," Hartiss told me one day when we were discussing

this subject. This graphic phrase contains the key to an enigma which goes back to the golden age of the Travelers and of which nobody either can or will give me an explanation.

TEN

VISION IN MOVEMENT

Everything about a man can be expressed by movement, from the stealthy gestures observed only by his immediate neighbor, to the way he walks or writes, draws or paints. The attitudes and movements of his body, his writing or painting are all forms of expression that graphologists and psychologists try to interpret. They can often give a very accurate diagnosis, for each individual stamps his actions or movements with the mark of his own personality. So although one cannot always understand the meaning of certain Gypsy signs of recognition, one can usually identify those who have drawn the outlines.

During the German Occupation when I lived in rue Maître-Albert, I served as a "post office" for Gypsies hunted by the Gestapo who wanted to cross over the demarcation line between Occupied and Unoccupied France. The messages were inscribed behind the swing door of the left portal of Notre-Dame. The men who sketched the designs didn't know how to read or write. And yet, when I deciphered the messages, I immediately knew who the authors were. The squares, circles, triangles, and crosses brought to mind the faces of the men who had drawn them. No

confusion was possible between the trembling outlines of my friend Worns and those of the fairground wrestler Baron, or between the little pointed crosses of Thumi and the enormous ones of Gregory Borsh or those of Gunther Walss, done so precisely they looked as if they had been traced by an architect. Hitler's gas chambers took their toll of some of these men. Others, like Baron, managed to escape. I can never pass Notre-Dame without giving a glance at that door, which for these men was the doorway to liberty.

"If you manage to get out," I used to tell them the last night before they left, "if you bring it off and if you ever come back to Paris, leave your sign at Notre-Dame. It doesn't matter when, even if it is twenty years from now. Then I shall know that somewhere or other, you are still alive."

On October 3, 1954, on this wooden door where hands from the past had traced out the "traveling signs" of their ancestors, I came across a chalk drawing of a snake inside an oval. The sketch was neat and precise. It summed up for me the force, tenacity, and spirit of Baron, and I remembered what had happened there twelve years earlier. Before leaving, Baron had given me an egg, saying, "Throw this as hard as you can against a wall. If what is inside it sticks to the wall, I shall have passed over the demarcation line safely."

I put the egg in my pocket, and when I got home I took it out and looked at it. It was then I saw that the pointed end had been pierced and sealed up again with wax. That night, opening the corridor window of the apartment house, which looked out onto a small courtyard, I threw the egg against the opposite wall with all my strength. There was a loud smack, and I watched a long pointed stain spread down the wall. In the dark I thought I could make out a more solid mark in the center of the stain. It wasn't until the following morning that I noticed a minute snake formed the center of the mark. My friend must have

reached safety! I felt convinced this was so, a conviction confirmed twelve years later by the chalk drawing on one of the doors of Notre-Dame.

The reason I have mentioned this curious episode is that Baron was an extraordinary man. He possessed, like Hartiss, the special gift of being able to "read" a man not by studying his writing or drawing, but by watching his behavior and way of moving. The way he picked up an object or took hold of a glass, the way he sat down or walked—everything held a special meaning for Baron. In fact, everyone has his own special rhythm, and this rhythm reveals his character. However hard he may try to rid himself of his natural rhythm and assume instead an artificial set of attitudes, these will always betray his inner self to anyone with a grain of perspicacity and the gift for applying it. But these investigations of Baron and Hartiss didn't stop at a mere character reading, which is within the range of any amateur psychologist. They were also able to detect deep-seated cases of mental unbalance, sometimes unsuspected, and to disclose the sources of inner conflicts and contradictions without ever addressing a word to their "patient." The knowledge these two Gypsies had acquired was in no way an exact science.

One day, one of my friends, who had his doubts about Hartiss's powers, asked him to tackle something out of the ordinary. Amused, Hartiss accepted. My friend, who was married, had two children, a boy and a girl. Hartiss had often told me he was capable of judging a man by his movements alone, and that the way he mounted a horse told him more about the man than the sound of his voice. So for a week Hartiss dogged the man's footsteps. He watched the way he sat on a chair, leaned against a table or a bar, the way he drank or lit a cigarette, walked in the street or drove his car. Then he followed the wife as she did her shopping or walked in the streets. He also pursued the couple when they were out together on foot or in their car. He shadowed them so skill-

fully that neither of them realized he was under observation.

Hartiss then asked me to bring him two letters, one written by the man and the other by his wife. I did what he asked and met him in a café one evening. He took the letters, opened them, and placed them side by side on the marble-topped table. He then placed his hands on them, palms downward. Later, when he took his hands away, one could still see the imprint of them on the paper, while the hands themselves were covered with sweat and marbled over with white marks.

"This sort of thing tires one out," he said with a smile. "But at least I know I was not mistaken."

"Well," I said, "I can see you also need to have something in writing before you can discover things."

"No, Pierre" he replied, "I needed to have the feel under my hands of paper that has kept some of the fluid from the man and the woman who have written on it. Inanimate things can often keep the imprint of life within them. I'll teach you all about that when the time comes."

Then, one day he handed me a few typewritten sheets of paper and said, "Here, give this to your friend. It tells him what is past in his life and what is to come."

What follows is the text of Hartiss's verdict. I learned later that he had hit the nail on the head as far as this couple was concerned. He had discerned things about them of which I knew nothing. I have felt it necessary to add certain comments and explanations to the original text to make it easier to understand—without, however, betraying the identity of the people concerned. Some phrases I still find incomprehensible. They obviously only make sense to the couple for whom they were intended. I have included them just the same, because the complete text gives a very good idea, both as to content and style, of the kind of diagnosis given by certain *kakos*.

The following numbered paragraphs are sometimes

addressed to either the husband or the wife—usually to the husband—and some are intended for both. It was up to the couple to interpret them and draw conclusions from them insofar as their perceptiveness and understanding permitted.

I

Have you ever let a steel marble fall onto a flat marble slab? It is a highly instructive experiment.

[This phrase, which reoccurs throughout, refers to what magicians call the backlash. In the present context it means beware of the unexpected consequences of an action, the rebound which can at times be painful, even fatal. The bouncing of the ball (the evil eye) on the marble (death) is a striking illustration of the ancient Chinese law of correlative actions and reactions.]

II

Memory is a mechanical quality necessary for some people.

[This is an allusion to the husband's professional occupation. This had so clouded his whole life that nothing seemed to exist for him outside it, not even happy memories from the past.]

III

The secret only belongs to the one who possesses it; it can be "suffering."

[This is a reference to the couple's unsatisfactory sex life.]

IV

How can you expect to be accepted lying down, when standing up you accept a slap on the face?

[Refers to the husband's tense relationship with his wife.]

V

Fate is sometimes unkind; it gives intelligence to one of you and the other resents this.

VI

It is no good waiting for things to happen; you must go full steam ahead.

VII

The dice have been thrown, and are you not accomplices?

VIII

Have you ever thrown a steel marble onto a flat marble slab? Do it; the experiment is rich in wisdom.

IX

Put away from you the need to live through a succession of dramas. Try patiently to become an adult.

X

Don't systematically shut out your partner from spiritual joys which give serenity.

XI

Unaccustomed because disused
Disused because not thought out
Not thought out because taken by surprise
Taken by surprise because unfamiliar.

XII

One should not put on boots to step on a serpent's tail, but rather with bare feet crush its head.

[This refers to the husband's inferiority complex.]

XIII

Your misfortune is to be what you are—on the one side fear, on the other cowardice—and both of you dressed up in Harlequin's fragile cloak.

[The husband and wife were mutually afraid of each other, one of physical force, the other of superior intelligence. The allusion compares the fragility of their mutual understanding with that of Harlequin's dance on a tightrope.]

XIV

Never talk about your wife to your friends or discuss your friends with your wife.

XV

And vice versa.

XVI

Stay calm. The more excited one becomes, the calmer one should be—particularly as one tends to get carried away easily.

XVII

Do not deprive the other of agreeable friendships.

XVIII

If you use force and the other is frightened, then you possess nothing.

XIX

Do not use alcohol to give yourself the kind of courage which exists only in your imagination; otherwise you will become a complete coward.

XX

Do not be like a child and always try to have the last word.

XXI

If you try to copy other people's lives you will only spoil your own and that of your spouse, and you will submerge each other with false joys.

XXII

Do not be jealous of those who appear to be unheeding, for they are perhaps wiser than you know, and the way you behave distresses them.

[Allusion to an unconscious jealousy disguised with reproaches.]

XXIII

Do not try to judge the cowardice of others by comparing it with the courage you believe you possess, or vomit will come up into your mouth.

XXIV

Have you tried this experiment? Throwing a steel marble against an ascending flight of steps?

If so, what did you learn?

If not, do it. Do it!

XXV

Take counsel with yourself each time the other gives the kind of judgment you should be making for yourself.

XXVI

Beware! As well as the recognized forms of vengeance, there are those so disguised that they don't appear to be vengeance at all. These kinds kill love.

XXVII

Trying to keep pace with other people's lives, one falls short in one's own and fails one's companion.

XXVIII

Watch out, for anger appears diverting to a man who lives with wisdom.
[Anger shows up the one who is its victim.]

XXIX

Search out the uneasiness in your human relationships.

XXX

Beware of the backlash if you throw a little steel ball onto a marble slab.

XXXI

If hate is in your heart, how do you dare make love?

XXXII

If the other one fills you with fear, your belly cannot feel real warmth, and your body will not be satisfied. From dissatisfaction comes a complex. A complex leads to a neurosis, and neurosis to unhappiness. With unhappiness the heart dies, so you then love fishing or playing billiards.

[The husband's complexes have their origin partly in his daily dealings with his wife. These in their turn lead to unsatisfactory sexual relations.]

XXXIII

If you use the other to show contempt for what is strange or foreign, he or she in turn will have to endure your scorn.

XXXIV

There is no cowardly escape that does not fail even if it has been well contrived.

[This alludes to the husband's refusal to accept his responsibilities.]

XXXV

Some day or other one has to decide to leave one's mother's womb.

[Refers to the husband's Oedipus complex.]

XXXVI

To admit you are frightened of the other is to let cowardice into your soul.

XXXVII

Laziness is also a force and can drive an imbecile to any extreme.

[Refers to the gross inertia of one of the couple.]

XXXVIII

Don't trouble yourself about people who have already forgotten your existence.

XXXIX

Ask yourself why the face of the other is marked with lines of worry.

XL

A marble slab, a steel marble . . .
What is it and what does it show?

XLI

One can fail to get any happiness oneself if one is continually asking why other people achieve it.

XLII

If you shut up your loved one inside the house he will shut other doors in front of you.

[Referring to a curious habit practiced by one of the couple.]

XLIII

One sometimes sacrifices sincere friendships for a love that does not exist.

XLIV

Once intelligence allows itself to be overcome by fear, then chaos takes over and drives out tranquillity.

XLV

Don't show off in front of strangers, but devote your time to trying to understand one another.

XLVI

It is not always a good thing to model your own behavior on that of your father.

XLVII

In your home, fear kills love, and constraint kills pleasure. One day you will be tempted to flee. Be on your guard against this.

XLVIII

One should love one's father, but not be blind to his faults.

XLIX

Avoid slackness in your gestures, attitude, and words.

L

Be warned against those who seek to provoke quarrels because they profit by it.

LI

Don't search back in your childhood memories for reasons for your adult dislikes.

LII

Beware of the little steel ball if you find a *vertical* marble slab.

LIII

Beware of opinions that are forced upon you; they will cloud your mind and prevent you from forming your own judgment.

LIV

Watch a child. And then ask yourself why he does certain underhanded things.

LV

Why be drawn into dramatic situations that are none of your making? Instead fight your own personal drama which you have built up around yourself. In that way the happiness you give others will help you too.

LVI

Be careful—your child carries within him a part of your most secret self. He can only flourish if you yourself are flourishing.

LVII

To fulfill oneself brings joy; deceptions bring worry.

LVIII

Don't try to take a fox by storm; you will only make him smile. A smile is the beginning of joy, and the joy of the fox will cause you worry.

[The "smile of the fox" is the judgment of those who see things clearly, the intelligent onlookers.]

LIX

If life has given you much material gain, but happiness eludes you, don't concern yourself with those

who have no worldly goods and yet are happy. For envy is very close to hate.

LX

If you meet a couple who live in the middle of a crowd as if they were on a desert island, either be understanding or give them a wide berth. Beware the little steel ball that one throws on a slab of marble, be it horizontal or vertical.

LXI

To force your contempt on a stranger is to open the door to scorn against the one who first incited you to become contemptuous.

LXII

If you keep a watch on your tongue when you talk to the other, then you will be cautious of your body when you are being made love to, and you will be living a lie.

LXIII

If you have difficulty in a conversation, then don't try to carry on two separate ones at the same time.

LXIV

Don't battle jealously against the intelligence of the other. Keep up your own standards.

LXV

Sometimes cowardice takes the form of attributing to other people the intentions that are your own.

LXVI

A couple kills their mutual understanding when they open the door to constraint.

LXVII

To force the other to give up certain things is to open the door to desires which fret at the spirit because the body is denied them.

LXVIII

Push away from you the counsels of some of your childhood mentors, for they are responsible for the way you live now.

LXIX

What you build up from remorse will be worthwhile if your love for the other is strong enough to counterbalance the remorse still buried within you.

LXX

Don't make fun of the sorcerer's apprentice; you will have need of him when he has become his own master.

During the course of their interminable wanderings, the Gypsies have developed several other methods of piecing together the psychological outlines of their fellows through interpreting their gestures and comportment. There are not, perhaps, so many riddles to solve with these alternative methods, but they are just as efficient in their own way.

They have established a series of tests similar to those practiced by psychoanalysts, but reserved for members of the Romany tribes only. One of the tests includes five terra-cotta statues of a man and a woman

showing five different positions of love (plate 4) arranged together to form the five points of a sorcerer's star. The nineteenth-century Gypsy had to place these statues in sequential order according to what seemed to him to be the most natural way of lovemaking. Most important for the diagnosis was the position given to the statue that portrayed the actual sexual act.

Placing it last, for instance, was interpreted as meaning that the Gypsy considered the act of sex as the only possible outcome of a relationship between a man and a woman. A *kako's* diagnosis was always kept secret, but the tribal sages believed that the man who made this choice was nothing but an egotistical brute who would always be guided by his possessive instinct. As a result, the tribal duties of such a man were cut to a minimum, and his usefulness was rated scarcely above that of a draft horse or a watchdog.

If, however, the Gypsy placed the sexual act in, say, the third position, and after it placed one of the statues showing a loveplay, this signified kindness, a sense of harmony in love. The man was then considered to have the qualities of a leader and a tribal chief, for to lead is to love.

The Gypsy who knows how to honor a woman with his hands and eyes as well as with his sex (remember that these are the three instruments of the magnetist) and uses all three with gentleness and respect, is looked upon as a man worthy to be trusted with the highest responsibilities.

III

The Magical Universe

ELEVEN

FAUNA AND FLORA OF THE GYPSIES

It is difficult for a gorgio, particularly a city dweller, to imagine just how important a place animals once had in the life of a Gypsy. A caravan without a horse or a dog was unthinkable. Between Gypsies and their animals there are very strong instinctive ties, no doubt because they lead similar lives and for both, feelings and instincts take pride of place over reason. They share the same needs—food and affection—the same climatic conditions, the same hardships; they both have to submit to the environment and to the passage of time. Their contact with all the different aspects of nature, its dangers as well as its beauty, is a permanent one.

The Gypsy child is as free as a bird. He can crawl about in the mud, wander in the forest, eat and sleep when he feels like doing so. As soon as he reaches the age of four or five, the women of the tribe who have been initiated into its customs encourage him to make signs with his hands, any kind of instinctive sign he feels like making. These signs are interpreted using a code which has never been revealed to me.

The child is then given a secret name that only the members of his own tribe are allowed to know. This name is always that of an animal, like Brutus or Pacha (lion), Niès (fox), Pulco (eagle), Grinna (bear), Lovenito (little wolf), or Lovenita (the little she-wolf).

From that time onward the child is expected to be-

have in a manner akin to the nature of the animal whose name he bears and who is in a way his "archetype." He is supposed to imitate its way of hunting and eating, learn to appreciate its qualities and "code of honor" and the laws which govern its life. Until he is fourteen years old, when he is considered an adult, his education corresponds to these laws and is a completely personal instruction that has nothing at all in common with the collective teaching practiced in the schools and colleges of the gorgios.

Among the animals with whom the Gypsy easily identifies himself, first place should be given to the wolf, his faithful companion in Central Europe. The Gypsy admires the wolf's endurance and code of honor.

The wolf never murders one of its own race: it kills only to eat or to eliminate a rival in love.

When the old chief of the pack confronts a young male in single combat and proves the stronger of the two, when the old wolf bares its teeth ready to plunge them into the jugular vein of its adversary, the animal

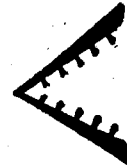


Figure 4. Wolf

only simulates the death bite—and then just urinates. If the chief is unlucky and the young male is the stronger, the old wolf relinquishes its place and becomes a lone animal, a patriarch respected by the rest of the pack.

When the wolf was the Gypsy's friend and companion, as was often the case in the past in Central Europe, it would never attack its master's horse, for it considered the man, his family, and the horse to be part of its own "pack."

As for the fox, it behaves as a Romany would in

his relations with the gorgios. It avoids the villages, but knows how to get its food by ruse.

The eagle is free and proud. When in captivity it rebels against all forms of training. The nomad respects and fears the eagle at the same time. It represents force and violence; its hieroglyph is a target sign—a bird that swoops to kill.

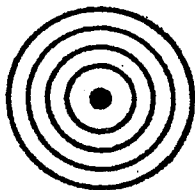


Figure 5. Eagle

The crow is envied for its "tribal" wisdom and sense of organization. Some crows are migratory; others act as look-outs. Crow "tribal councils" are known to exist. A bird that has disobeyed tribal laws commits suicide by letting itself fall from a great height. The crow's behavior is greatly admired by the Gypsy, who considers it exemplary. Far better to die than live without honor. The sign of the crow is two half-moons facing each other—the symbol of justice.

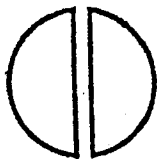


Figure 6. Crow

The rat is admired for its intelligence and the systematic organization of the pack. I have seen some Gypsies use a pack of rats to guard them at night instead of watchdogs. The rats gave piercing shrieks at the approach of a stranger. Still other Gypsies know the mysterious "walk of the rats"; the rodents

don't attack the Gypsy but follow him as if he were the Pied Piper of Hamelin. And that's not all; certain Romanies claim they can talk to rats and consider this to be nothing very extraordinary!

The rat is the symbol of intelligence.



Figure 7. Rat

The cat, represented by an offset circle, symbolizes complete detachment and patience.

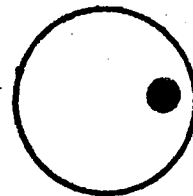


Figure 8. Cat

The owl is the symbol of clairvoyance, because it keeps vigil and can see clearly at night while other creatures fumble about in the dark. Its hieroglyph, frequently used in witchcraft, is a half-moon in a horizontal position topped by two eyes; it can also be a five-pointed star flanked with two eyes.



Figure 9. Owl

The bat stands for lucidity of thought and vision, because it can see through total darkness. The sign of this animal, supposedly deaf and blind, is made up of an eye, an ear, and a horizontal line meaning "negative." This symbol does not indicate a diminution of the faculties of sight and sound but rather an intuitive rejection of lies, an ability to see beyond outward appearances.



Figure 10. Bat

The toad, like the owl and the bat, is an animal favored by sorcerers. It represents wisdom, light, and the feminine gender.

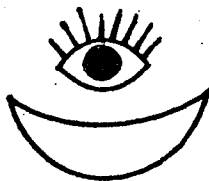


Figure 11. Toad

The snake, often a symbol of sexuality, signifies force, energy and also femininity. Its hieroglyph is a whip.



Figure 12. Snake

As for the lizard, it is held to be the incarnation of fragility. Each animal is also allied to a mineral or

a plant. The lizard is linked with crystal. Its sign is a broken cane, perhaps because it loses its tail when anyone grabs it.



Figure 13. Lizard

Certain animals and plants are despised by the Romanies. One very rarely finds a Gypsy baby called Paloma or Colomba. The dove, which the gorgios consider a symbol of peace and goodwill, is for the nomads the incarnation of cruelty. And yet the Gypsies adore birds. "They love them so much," old Worns said to me once, "that when they hold out their arms to the sky, they feel as if they have wings."

But the dove is a sad exception, for it is the only bird that kills simply for its own pleasure. I can confirm this. I have trained doves for a music-hall act and



Figure 14. Dove

I've bred them for more than thirty years. I know what it is to find a young dove on the floor of the aviary pecked to death. The dove has none of the nobility of the wolf. It is so docile and obedient that certain forms of training, which can take up to eighteen

months with a magpie or blackbird, can be achieved with a dove in forty-eight hours.

For the nomad, the ax is the symbol of senseless destruction. It is the weapon of the executioner and of the lumberjack, who clears spaces in the forest, making it more difficult for the Gypsies to hide from the gorgios. The ax is therefore considered to be an appropriate symbol for the dove.

Curiously enough, the Gypsies have the same contempt for the rose, which the gorgios so frequently associate with love. As far as the Gypsy is concerned, roses and doves are classed together: both are agreeable to look at, but treacherous. The rose is all artifice; it is a monstrosity created by botanists, who in order to breed it, mutilated the *Rosa simplex*, or wild dog rose.

Many years ago during the spring equinox, the old *kakos* would chew on a handful of dog-rose stems and then spit the saliva over garden walls onto cultivated rose bushes, those marvelous "emblems of deceit." [Apart from determining the animal type to which he belongs, a child's early hand signs indicate his affinity for a particular flower or plant.]

A Hungarian friend of mine, a Gypsy called Karl Beurdens, told me that many years ago his ancestors, who were goldsmiths, used to devise ritual jewelry suggested by the hand signs made by children under fourteen years of age. These gestures were interpreted according to their resemblance to flowers and plants, and the design was then formed into personal jewelry.

Hartiss interpreted the gestures made by my two sons (shown in plate 5). According to him, the gestures made in the pictures on top represented the bramble leaf, the emblem of the wild rose. The hand signs pictured at the bottom, he likened to the clover leaf. These two leaves were part of the category allowed to be fashioned in gold. So in this way a young Gypsy can wear his "nature sign," because a male is allowed to display his power openly. A woman,

on the other hand, must keep hers secret; consequently she is not allowed to wear gold or silver jewelry depicting her "flower" gestures. A young girl is only allowed to mime them fleetingly during ritual dances, which no gorgio is ever permitted to see.

Plants and flowers also play an important role in quite another domain. This is something which does not concern all Gypsies, but only a few rare initiates. I refer to the secret of the "Tree Men." The Tree Men are *kakos* who happen to have been born either on the exact date of one of the equinoxes or solstices or seven days before or after those dates.

We know that the sun circle is composed of four quarters. The spring equinox falls on March 21, the summer solstice on June 24, the autumn equinox on September 23, and the winter solstice on December 22. Equinoxes and solstices fall respectively under the zodiac signs of Aries, Cancer, Virgo, and Capricorn. For the *kakos*, these dates correspond to the days of the oak, the birch, the olive, and the beech. I was never able to find out why these particular trees were chosen. The birch, for example, is called the "white tree" and is the symbol of purity. *Kakos* who are born on or around one of these dates are named after the appropriate tree. The tree itself also represents a zodiac sign, and the man who is named after it must try to express the qualities attributed to the tree.

I once knew a man who was called "The Oak." His companion was another Gypsy called "The Olive." Once a year they met up with two other men, "The Birch" and "The Beech," either in Chartres Cathedral or at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. The date and hour of their meeting was always the same: March 21st at midday, the spring equinox. Chartres is dedicated to a Virgin, and so is the Saintes-Maries—for Sara, the servant of the three saints, is known as "the Black Virgin." And for the Gypsies the "time of the virgin" is springtime. This accounts for the choice of date and place. The Gypsies quite naturally associate the figure of Christ with their conception of a Tree Man. The

importance of olive and palm branches in the Passion of Christ is well-known. He died on the "bole and branches of a tree," and a sculpture in Paris's Cathedral of Notre-Dame shows us the oak leaves encircling his body. Also, the birth of Christ falls close to the date of the winter solstice.

The hieroglyph of the equinoxes and solstices is a rectangle divided into eight parts, alternately black and white. The Tree Men use a circle rather than a rectangle when they draw their travel signs or messages inside churches near the baptismal fonts.

The two equinoxes correspond geographically to two islands. The spring one corresponds to the Ile de Camargue, the well-known meeting place of the Gypsies. The autumn one corresponds to the Isle of Man, off the northwest coast of British Isles. These two islands harbor rather special animals, and it may be that they have been chosen as meeting places because of this. The Camargue horse has one less vertebra than other horses; the species is never used in circuses. The Camargue bull is not a fighting bull and has a unique way of running.

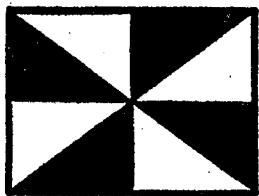


Figure 15.
Sign of equinoxes and solstices

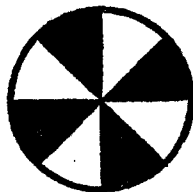


Figure 16.
Tree Men's version

The Isle of Man cat, the Manx, is short haired and has no tail. It jumps about like a rabbit. As for the inhabitants of this island, they are small, thickset, of Celtic origin, and known for their powers of sorcery.

I can give a very incomplete picture of the mysterious relationships one finds transposed onto jewelry or hieroglyphs. Only certain things were revealed to me;



1. Practice mask used to achieve strange affinity R. Doisneau



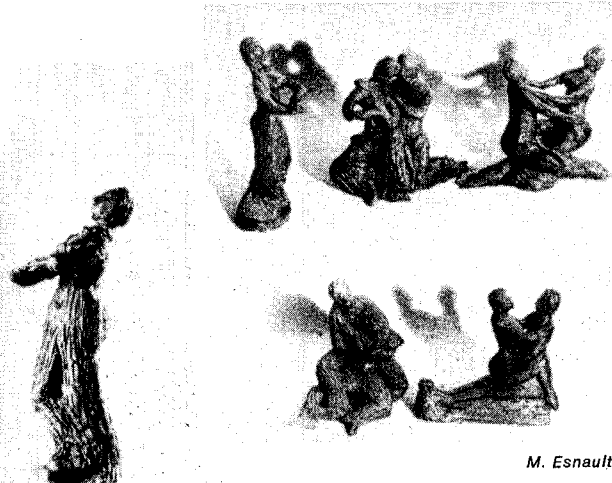
2. Faces

Arrangement by Mme. C.E. Derlon



3. Hand pass in claw movement

M. Esnault



M. Esnault



4. Terra-cotta statuettes representing positions of love

R. Doisneau



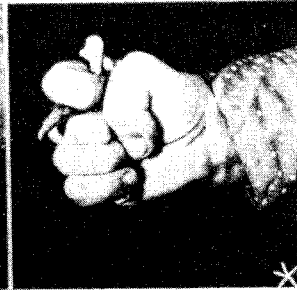
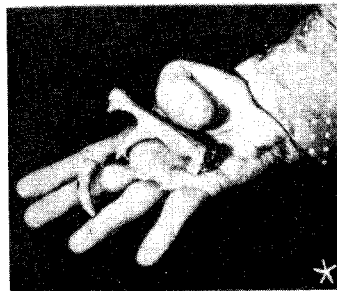
5. Children's hands

M. Esnault



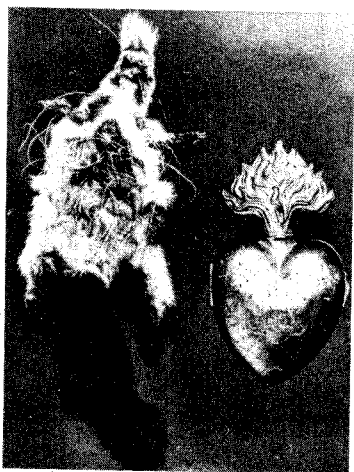
6. The countercurse

R. Doisneau



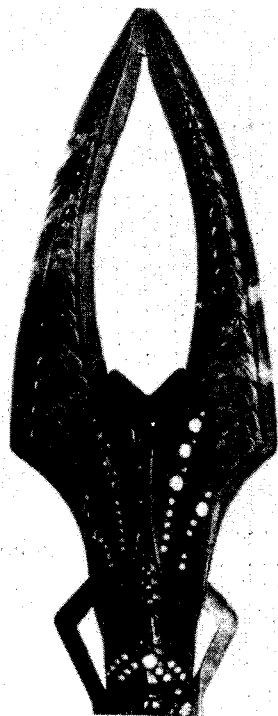
7. Claw weapon

M. Esnault



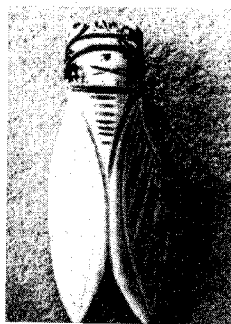
8. Squirrel skin and consecrated container

R. Doisneau



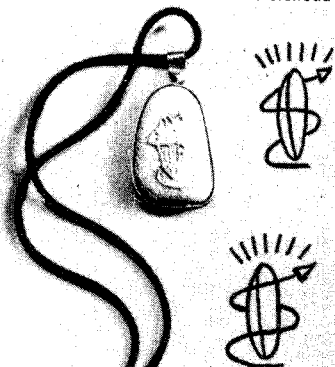
9. Tortoiseshell and gold cicada

R. Doisneau



10. Ivory cicada

R. Doisneau



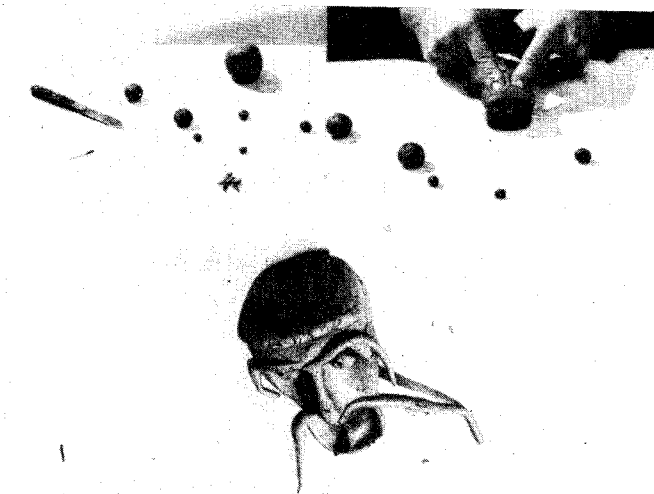
11. Jewel belonging to a Phuri Dai

R. Doisneau



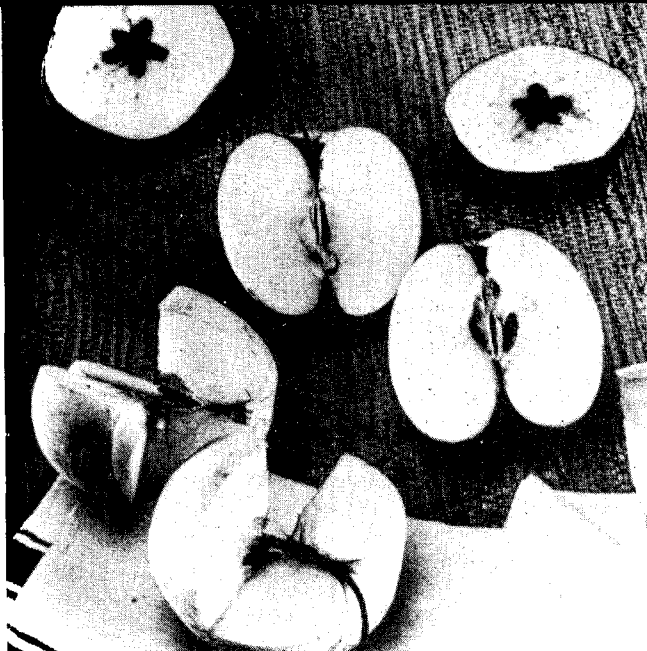
12. Icon shelf

R. Doisneau



13. Making a Gypsy mask

R. Doisneau



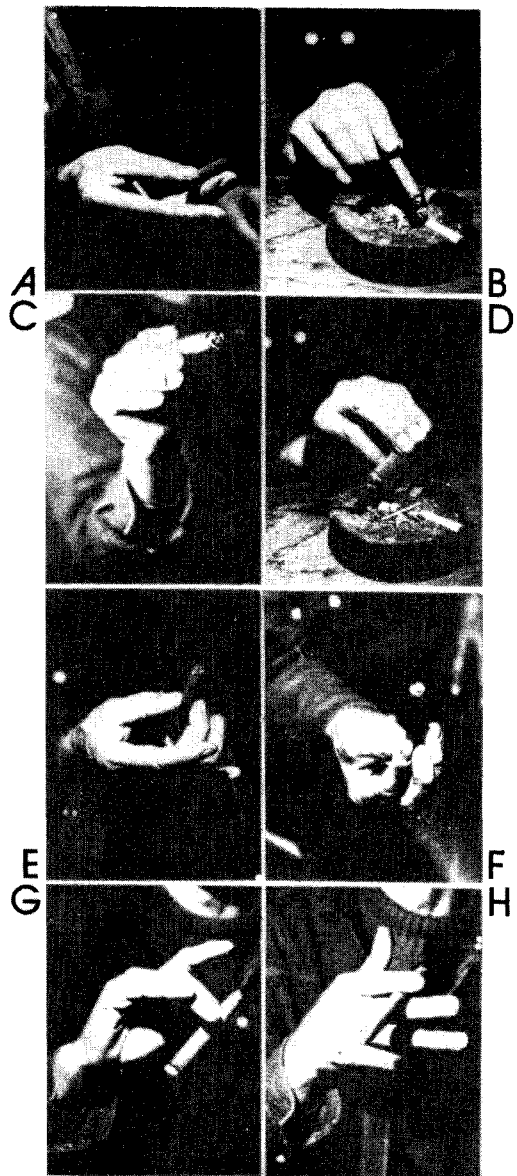
14. Apples—the ritual cut

R. Doisneau

15. Wedding breakfast

M. Esnault





16. Hand signs

Y. Descube

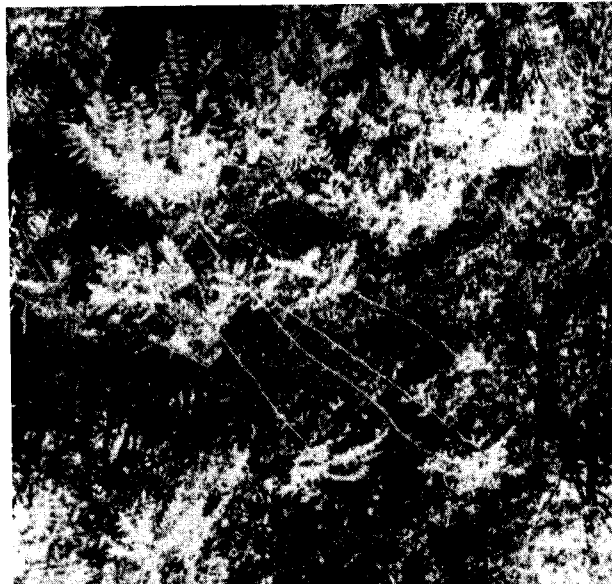


17. Love knot

M. Esnault

18. Stripped acacia branch

M. Esnault



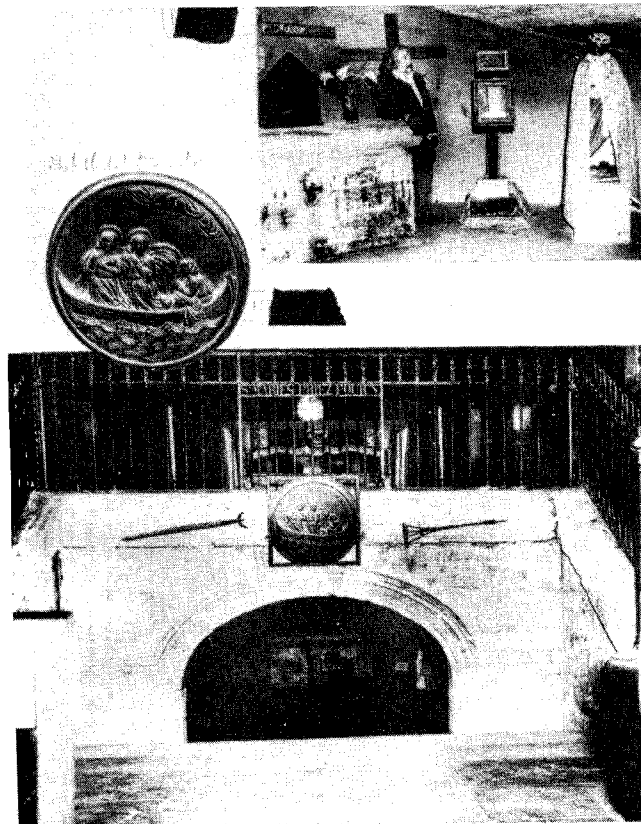


19. Tin plaque

R. Doisneau

20. Three clumps of earth

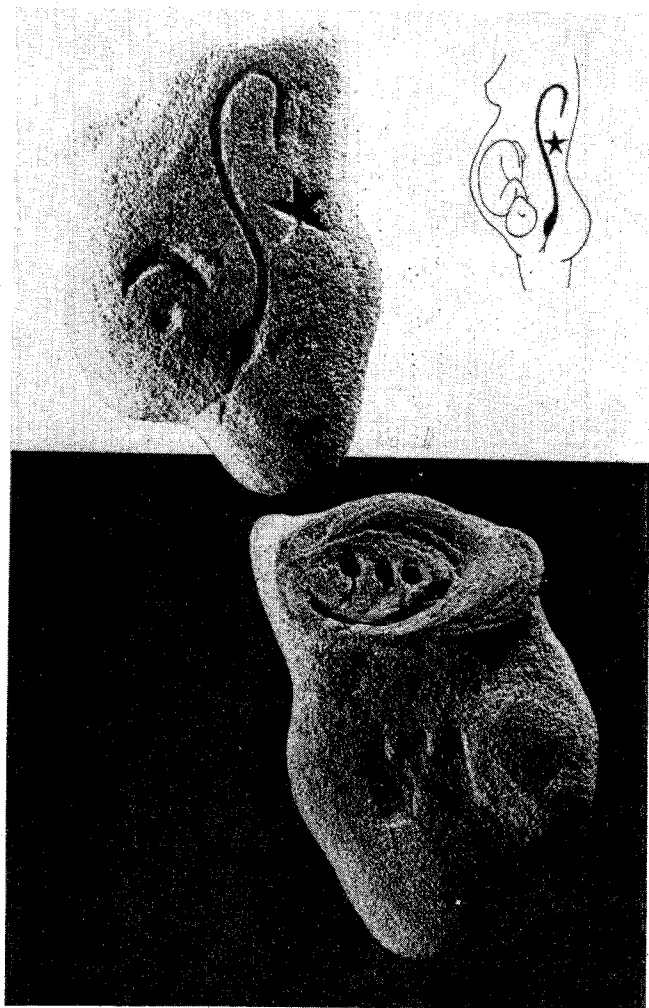
M. Esnault



22.

23. Crypt at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer

M. Esnault



24. Fertility stone

R. Doisneau



Design by Mme C.E. Derlon
Photo by M. Esnault

25. Gypsy map

I was not allowed to know any more. I did, however, learn of one strange activity of the Tree Men inside Chartres Cathedral.

Plate 6 shows my hand holding the "chicken bone" charms used against a sorcerer's malediction. I am wearing a ring given me by the wife of an archeologist, which is known as "the moon" or "the daughter of the sun."

Seeing it on my finger one day for the first time, Hartiss asked if he might borrow it, and if I would fix one of my wife's hairs on it from which it could be suspended.

I gave it to him a few days before the spring equinox, and when he returned it to me I learned something else. One of the men who helped lay the flagstones of Chartres Cathedral in the Middle Ages, set a metal button into one of the stones made of an alloy unknown to the Kaldéras sorcerers, the master tinkers. Some time later a master glassworker made a hole in one of the stained-glass windows he was constructing. Since then, every year on March 21 at 12 o'clock precisely, a ray of sun passes through the hole in the window and strikes down upon the piece of metal inlaid in the flagstone. This metal possesses a certain power, possibly magnetic. It was in this ray of sunlight that old Hartiss, in the company of a man who had come from I don't know where, swung my ring suspended from one of my wife's hairs. When he gave me back the ring, he said, "The daughter of the sun has now absorbed the force of her father."



26. Coucou Baptiste and the Archbishop George

TWELVE

THE SECRET OF THE CLAWS

Among the animals who play a special role in the Gypsies' world, the *Galliformes* (poultry and game birds) have a very high place. Stories, legends, magic rites, and mysterious signs evolve around the chicken, the hen, and the cock.

The Gypsy has a great respect for the hen or "wild fowl," and when he wants to eat the bird he strangles it quickly to avoid spilling its blood with a knife. To eat a wild fowl, cooked with cabbage and seasoned with garlic, with Joseph Bouglione or with the Kaldéras family at Montreuil, is a rare pleasure for a non-Gypsy. This delicious festive dish, which is served at baptisms or weddings or on special feast days, is made from different tribal recipes, all of them jealously guarded secrets. The different mixtures of herbs and spices that go into the dish were once linked with the magic rituals of the various wandering tribes.

Certain parts of the hen are, however, used for purposes that certainly have nothing to do with culinary achievement. For instance, a chicken's foot placed by itself in a special spot is a warning, a sign of death. An even stranger practice is for *kakos* to throw the heads and feet of chickens, the gizzards, hearts, and the testicles of a rooster, pell-mell into a pot. This is then left out on a frosty night or put into the snow until the contents are frozen solid. The resulting solid block presents a horrifying aspect. It is used by mediums and clairvoyants as a prop or aid

when they want to go into a state of trance. There is an obvious similarity here with voodoo practices.

Certain chicken bones mixed with those from a rooster can also be used for witchcraft. The strange "ballet of the bones" (plate 6) was intended to counteract a spell called "l'aiguillette," a medieval curse used by peasant sorcerers to render a husband impotent.

These are, of course, not the only parts of animals that are used to cast spells or exorcise curses, but it is not my purpose here to go into all that.

The rooster is thought of as a friend. The Gypsy admires the bird's natural pride and bravery in combat—for cocks only fight cocks. Like the wolf, the cock doesn't fight its rival to the death. But the rooster's primary importance is that it can ward off bad luck. Its dawn cry drives away spirits. In ordering stubborn ghosts back into their shadowy world, the rooster "protects life," say the people of the Kaldéras tribe. That is why one can often find the dried head of a cock nailed to a tree trunk at the entrance to a nomad camp.

For the Sinti tribe, the symbol of the cock is an indispensable part of a very curious ceremony. A tuft of cock feathers placed in a long-stemmed vase is part of the setting for the ritual matings described in Chapter 19. The bird's association with procreation and with life itself is thus evident.

Its protective function is illustrated by the use Gypsies once made of its talons to fashion a weapon (plate 7). According to Hartiss and Little Pierre, this forerunner of the American brass knuckles and the iron claws of the Congolese "leopard men" originated in the Middle Ages. It was made to be used as a weapon of defense, and its use in any other way was strictly forbidden. I can't reveal here the secrets of exactly how it is made, as the wisemen have asked me to keep silent on the point. It is not hard to make. The weapon is molded with fire in three different ways, and it is this hardening of the cock's spur that gives

the whole thing its maximum efficiency. Anyone armed with this weapon is a terribly dangerous opponent. It is a much more fearful weapon than brass knuckles—a man can be disemboweled with a single stroke. This deadly instrument is intended for use against the wild dogs and wolves that sometimes attack Gypsy encampments. Woe betide any rash gorgio who is foolhardy enough to attack the travelers. It fits into the hand perfectly, and once the fist is closed over it, the end of the claw dovetails into the palm.

A young Gypsy receives this weapon, which is made specially for him, at a ritual ceremony. Just before his fourteenth birthday the Gypsy child swears his "protective oath" to the *Phuri Dai* (the tribal mother), who holds in her hand an egg, the symbol of life. On this occasion each child is given a cock's foot, which he holds up as he takes the oath. When the ceremony is over, the children give their cocks' feet to the sorcerer, who in exchange gives them cockerels' feet with which they simulate the clenched fist, the sign of friendship among tribal brothers. They then have to pass the "trial by fire," the test of courage. The sorcerer then transforms the cocks' feet into weapons, which he hands over to the young Gypsies when they have proved their virility. The final presentation of the claw weapon signifies that the child has now become an adult and is responsible for the defense of the tribe.

The part of this custom which causes the most trouble is neither the making of the weapon nor the handing-over ceremony, but the choice of the bird. For the sorcerer makes his selection when the cock is still an embryo in the egg, before it becomes even a chick or a cockerel. How can a *kako* know which egg will hatch into a rooster and which into a hen?

"My grandfather was an 'egg toucher,'" Hartiss told me one day. Hartiss is eighty-eight years old, and if one considers that in each century there are usually five generations of Gypsies, Pietro's grandfather would have lived in the middle of the nineteenth century

—the era when Gypsy egg touchers made the rounds of the country fairs.

Well-known to the local peasants, the egg toucher held a regular yearly rendezvous, usually in front of the village church. Later he would visit farms in the area where he had been invited and would "touch" eggs brought to him for inspection. His work consisted of separating the eggs into two straw baskets, one made of natural straw, the other dyed with walnut stain. The female eggs went into the first basket, the male eggs into the second. But this was not the end of his strange powers. Once the sex had been decided, there then followed a second process that the *kakos* called "the breath of life." Taking hold of the chosen eggs one by one, either hen or cock, the Gypsy touched them again and chose those eggs most likely to hatch. Both the farmer and the farmer's wife had to swear to keep the whole affair secret. They also promised to hatch out two male eggs chosen by the toucher and to set the chicks under a white hen. These future roosters, considered the exclusive property of the sorcerer, were raised by the farmers for three years. They were then presented to the sorcerer and were ritually slaughtered at a summer-solstice ceremony. Their feet were later made into claw weapons.

Nineteenth-century peasants made a special cult of these roosters, for they believed the health and fitness of the entire farmyard depended on these particular cocks. As for the Gypsies, they felt that the awe and respect in which they were held by the country folk was a way of getting even with the gorgios. For in order to maintain a proper balance in their poultry yards, the farmers could not have any other roosters except the chosen ones.

THIRTEEN

TALISMANS AND JEWELS

Every religion venerates an object of some kind which is sacred to the cult and forbidden to the uninitiated. This can be anything from the ciborium of the Catholic priest to the "truth vessels" of secret societies or the oracles of wandering races. It works the same way with the Gypsies. Only those in the know recognize an object which may be displayed for all to see but which has special significance for a chosen few. When the wearer of a sacred ring meets the wearer of another special jewel, they usually share their secrets. The elder of the two coaches the younger until he in turn fashions a new jewel, better made and richer in meaning than the last. The object goes from transformation to transformation according to the new knowledge acquired by its owner.

With the Sinti tribe the starting point in the transformation of an "occult jewel" was always a precious stone, circular in shape, with a slightly convex top set in metal and worn as a ring. The outline of the stone, the metal, and the finger on which the ring was worn, had special significance. Some tribal chiefs wear an enormous diamond ring set with platinum on their third finger. This cannot be exchanged for the "ring of knowledge," a magic ring made with a black onyx set in silver. The diamond-and-platinum ring does not belong to the man who wears it. He is only the guardian of a jewel which has been passed

down to him and which he in turn will pass on one day to another man worthy to wear it.

The magic rings are always round "like the moon," the image of fertility, of the mother, which reflects the light of the sun at night. The settings of these black stones are therefore always silver, the moon material. (Gold is the metal of the sun.) The part of the jewel that is not visible to the naked eye because it is hidden by the setting symbolizes the hidden surface of the moon. Only the finger in contact with the jewel "sees" the hidden part and gathers knowledge from it. Occult jewels always have one side to them that everyone can see; it is agreeable to look at, set with precious stones and medallions. The other side discloses the deeper significance of the whole design. The decoration is only a camouflage to distract the noninitiated from the real meaning of the ornament.

The jewel shown in Plate 9 is a masterpiece of its type. Fashioned in tortoiseshell and gold, it has an intriguing shape. Each detail has a meaning of its own. The whole thing is a very stylized representation of a cicada. The real significance is not apparent at first glance, and to understand more about it, the jewel should be turned over on its other side. Then one sees that the underside of the cicada has the form of a Grecian urn, while a design inside the urn resembles a cornucopia turned upside down.

Both these shapes are connected with nourishment. The second one represents food storage—in other words, "foresight." "The wise man takes measures to provide food for his family and keeps watch to see that he gets it" is a maxim of the Sinti tribe.

So this jewel stands for wisdom and knowledge and is possessed by only a very few initiates. But this is not all. Seen straight on, the urn fades out to become a spearhead, which for the Gypsy is a sign of "controlled projection"—in other words, the gift of foresight. The shape of the cornucopia brings to mind a woman's sex; the goldsmith has suggested its at-

tractiveness, magnetism, and fertility. The jewel stands for nourishment, foresight, projection, attraction, and fertility. Translated according to Gypsy traditions, it means "life," "I uphold," "I am coming," "come," and once more, "life."

Pietro Hartiss explained to me one of the meanings as it concerned a man and wife as well as the entire tribe. "If you come, then I shall come and uphold life," which can refer to procreation as well as to the responsibilities of a chief toward his tribe.

The fact that there is twice a reference to life, one aspect being nourishment and the other fertility, indicates that the witch doctor who owns the jewel is also a tribal chief. The tribal leader "takes life and gives it." He can take life if the safety or preservation of the tribe is menaced. The sorcerer decides if newborn babies suffering from physical or mental malformations who might therefore be a burden on the tribe should be allowed to live. It is on police record that Gypsy babies who are born with serious physical or mental defects usually die before they are weaned. They die a so-called "natural" death that doctors are unable to explain. After all, don't the Eskimos put their old people out to die on an ice floe?

The respect Gypsies have for their old people is on a par with the love they have for their children. However, I have never noticed any mentally retarded or seriously deformed children among the Gypsy tribes I have known, which would seem to indicate that a selection is made soon after birth.

But let's get back to our jewel and its occult meaning. The stone that forms the insect's head projects from the section formed by its neck and thorax. It is as black as the ritual ring—which the Gypsies call the "eye"—worn by "the Learned Ones" and handed down from generation to generation, from finger to finger. Black, the color of the uncreated, contains all the other colors, as the "Absolute" contains the world

and all its elements. The black head of the insect is thus the center, the origin, the point of departure.

The real cicada's wings are made to fly in the first of all the natural elements, air—but the goldsmith has given the jewel wings the shape of a mussel shell, which brings it in touch with the second element, water. The reflection of light (fire) is obtained by the precious stones inlaid in the tortoiseshell wings. Each stone is cut into the form of a six-sided pyramid. This reflection of light is also found on the jeweled head of the insect.

The cicada is fixed in the death position and is garbed like an Egyptian mummy, its wings encrusted with precious stones, showing the influence of the ancient Egyptian art of decorating mausoleums. (Don't forget that in the Middle Ages, the Gypsy was called "an Egyptian" or "Prince of Little Egypt.")

The insect—or, rather, the man who is represented by the insect's body—wears the "necklace of fame" around his neck. This added distinction means the man who made the jewel possesses extraordinary powers. The position of the insect's feet further emphasizes this, for what one takes to be its feet are really the sculptured arms of a man stretching up as far as the eyes. The real cicada has its feet folded neatly underneath it, and they are much more thread-like and about one-quarter less bulky than the jeweled ones.

The position of the hands held up to the eyes is that of a man looking into the distance. "The man who sees into the distance possesses the gift of clairvoyance and has the right to secrecy" is a dictum of the Sinti tribe.

On the jewel this secrecy is portrayed by a horizontal line under the eyes and also by the necklace of fame. Also, each piece of tortoiseshell fitted together to make the wings symbolizes a particular faculty or ability. So it is easy to see that this apparently ordinary piece of jewelry has an impressive number of hidden meanings. I have indi-

cated several of them, but the possibilities of further interpretation are endless. No doubt a true initiate would find much to add by bringing into play the science of numbers and colors.

It must be stressed that an object of this sort is not merely a sign of authority and a symbol. Thought out by a sorcerer, then created by a goldsmith, it can possess a power which helps its owner to accomplish certain tasks. Strange to say, this jewel, conceived by a man—a chieftain and a sage—for his own personal use, has, since 1917, belonged to a succession of women, the *Phuri Dai*, the tribal mothers. In 1917 it belonged to Francesca H., in 1934 to Caleda de Bellonte, in 1957 to Marlene Baumgarten, and in 1967 it passed to Claude Emery Derlon, my wife.

There was a time when the gorgios had the habit of recruiting into their armies every passing Gypsy they could get their hands on. From sheer necessity, the tribes often became matriarchal instead of patriarchal. My sister, the tribal mother Grinna Mellatti, took over from her husband, Giuseppe, when he was killed in the war. Caleda de Bellonte and Marlene Baumgarten each took over their responsibilities at a critical moment in the life of their tribes. Caleda de Bellonte was a courageous woman who put an end to the knife battles between Gypsy youths that disrupted the life of her tribe. As for Marlene Baumgarten, she helped put a brake on the constant departure of married couples who wished to live a sedentary life outside the tribe. My wife, who is not a Gypsy by birth, received the jewel in a special circumstance, from the hands of Hartiss. When he gave it to her, he said, "This jewel has come to the end of its journey. When you wear it, it will die on you, and you will better understand the mystery of death when you have seen it alive. Never wear it on a metal chain. Suspend it from a strong ribbon."

For two years my wife left the jewel in the bottom of her handbag among all the usual woman's

clutter of keys and cosmetics. Jostled around continually, its stones retained their brilliance and the gold ornamentation continued to shine. And then, one day, she hung the jewel on a ribbon around her neck and was hardly ever without it. From that day onward the cicada lost its brightness. The gold setting and gilding seemed to become absorbed or wear away, until one could see a tortoiseshell skeleton through it. One of the jeweled eyes fell out. Bit by bit the cicada became completely mutilated. Two years of jiggling around inside a handbag did nothing to damage it, but given the same length of time in the open air, it began to disintegrate into the plain tortoiseshell shape it was before the goldsmith gave it its coat of gold and precious stones.

Actually, I did not immediately realize how much it had deteriorated. It was not until I saw a colored reproduction of it in all its shining glory that I understood my wife's cicada was "dead."

As soon as it reached this state, Hartiss offered my wife another one. It was much more of an antique than the former one and made probably out of ivory (plate 10). There was something puzzling about this cicada, because seen from the back, its silhouette resembled the spreading leaves of the lotus flower. Unhappily, its symbolism is completely unknown to me. I was, however, able to make out on the back of the insect a hieroglyph meaning "wisdom": seven small horizontal lines surmounted by a flattened cross and a small circular spot.

It was quite by chance, one day when my wife and I were drinking a bottle of local white wine and eating a *friture* (dish of fried whitebait) at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, that I was given more details about the second cicada. With us at table was Yotsa Gorgan, a photographer working with the Bouglione Circus. Yotsa, who was a chief of the Kaldéras tribe, had lost the power of speech. A severe illness had left him dumb. Although he did not appear to be listening to what one said, he actually heard very well.

My wife placed the two cicadas on the table in front of him, first the ivory one and then the old one of gold and precious stones. Gorgan smilingly made a negative sign. Then, turning toward me, he made a second sign. Putting his thumb and little finger together, he held out the other three fingers over the two cicadas.

There was, therefore, a connection between the figure three and the jewels. The number three and its geometric equivalent, the triangle, signify life. Many jewels are carefully worked out from this number. The Gypsies believe man to be composed of three parts: the body, which perishes; the spirit, which is eternal; and an intermediary but nonmaterial body that links the other two. I perceived that there were three phases according to which the jewel could be interpreted: as probably the live cicada itself, dried and mummified (some Gypsies keep one inside a pendant worn around their necks); as transformed into bone or ivory; and finally the jewel, in all its glory of gold and precious stones.

I later had confirmation of this three-phase development. After one of my journeys trying to track down the hieroglyphs of the road, Hartiss gave my wife his mother's sign, a serpent coiled around a grain of corn—the shape of the female sex. This happened on May 8, 1971, at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. One of the villagers agreed to carve the design on a stone and to make a pendant which I could give my wife when I returned from my next trip.

However, the sign was incomplete. When I gave the design to the artist who was to carry out the work, I had only the initial shape—that is to say, the first stage. It lacked two complementary elements, seven short vertical lines over the design and a long horizontal line underneath. The completed design is a symbol of authority (plate 11). The woman who wears it has great power. The seven vertical lines are seven rays of sun. They signify life force and knowledge. The horizontal line stands for the road, the unending

journeys of the nomads. The three elements together, the snake and the vertical and horizontal lines, correspond to three phases in the life of a Gypsy woman: the virgin (the snake coiled around the female sexual orifice), the woman (the sun's rays), and the grandmother matriarch (the road). The jewel is modified according to the age of the woman and finally evolves into the sign of the *Phuri Dai*, the tribal mother: "On the road I am the knowledge and the power, therefore the mother of the tribe."

If one day during your travels you see a pendant hanging around the neck of a Gypsy woman fortune-teller, or a ring on the hand of a male clairvoyant, you should realize that this is not just a piece of decorative craftsmanship but something that is the mark of an ancient civilization. For the Gypsy, his jewel is not just a beautiful object but a repository of his inner spirit and of the way he views the world.

FOURTEEN

THE ICON SHELF

Each Gypsy caravan shelters a certain number of religious or magical objects. One finds charms, fetishes, keepsakes, props for casting spells, and religious pictures of all kinds. These objects are either fixed to the wall or placed on an "icon shelf," a little wall shrine where the Gypsy gathers together all the things he most treasures. Plate 12 shows an icon shelf that once belonged to a sorcerer, a veterinarian and mailman who used to wend his way along the highways and byways in a horse-drawn caravan. The shrine that holds

the icons is portable; it can be folded up for the journey and thus occupy very little space. The shelf is either hung on the wall of the caravan or simply stood upright.

The silver cup shaped like a scallop shell and suggesting a dove is similar to a liturgical vessel employed at a baptismal ceremony. It is used as a container for decoctions of herbs made into aphrodisiacs by some sorcerers. The picture on the back of the shelf shows a portrait of Sara the Kali, bareheaded, her robe covered with pictures and talismans. This reproduction, published by Sanctuary Publications, which once numbered priests among its editors, shows the face of Sara portrayed according to Gypsy tradition. Certain ritualists bare their heads to kiss the lips of Sara. I don't believe that special prayers to Sara exist. At least, I have never heard any. There does exist, however, not a prayer, but a sort of chant that used to be murmured by women in the crypt of Saintes-Maries before priests prohibited use of the church at night. Before lying down to sleep on the floor of the crypt, young Romany women who were pregnant or who wanted to have a child used to intone:

My hair covers my face,
my body is naked beneath my robe.
It carries the marks
of those who have left my womb.
Their weight on my shoulders
does not stop me dancing,
for the weight of a son
is not heavy in the womb.

The object on the right-hand side of the shelf is a specially shaped "cupping glass" about a century old. It contains a mixture of men's and women's hair as well as horsehair. The horse stands for force and power. These different elements bound together are credited with the power of casting a sexual spell and of ensuring marital harmony.

Another example of this particular combination frequently used by Gypsies is a squirrel skin through which has been threaded hair from the tail of a Camargue horse as well as women's hair (plate 8). It is hidden in a consecrated container about seven inches in diameter whose shape resembles both a woman's behind and a heart [love] and whose top is a flame design [passion]. The container is then placed under the bed of the person with whom one wishes to have sexual relations.

The top shelf of the wall bracket holds objects mostly of Hindu origin. (It is known that Gypsies originally came from the north of India). The statuette was given to me by the writer Jacques Yonnet because it made him feel uneasy. It had certainly been magnetized by someone who knew what he was about, for Hartiss could make it vibrate like a pendulum. For five years I used it as a kind of catalyst to help me get to sleep. It took a long time before my wife could bear to touch it. I found out the way it was made one day when it fell on the floor and broke. When my wife tried to repair it, she lost her former repugnance toward touching it. This Hindu statuette, absolutely identical to one in the possession of the tribal chief Polaroff, is carved from wood and made up of a number of separate parts. The articulation of the neck, elbows, and shoulders is achieved by pieces of metal. The wood is protected by a coat of japanned varnish. The little wooden statue has a metal skeleton and is covered with a material that feels like human skin, which gives it its striking similarity to a human body.

It had certainly been made for the practice of casting spells; for the person who could make it work for that purpose it could be a sleeping aid. It could be held in the hollow of the hand, like a fruit, and, with the right magnetic force, a person could clasp it tight and meet the stare of its strange eyes.

Separated from the statuette by a bunch of dried violets is a vase, also of Hindu origin. A heavy layer of charcoal covers the bottom of the bronze vessel. The

drawings that decorate it are strangely like the designs that Tita Parni, wife of Matheo Maximof, chief of the Kaldéras tribe, drew on the stove she had at the Montreuil Gypsy encampment near Paris. The vase is also a kind of magnetic accumulator. I noticed the violets lasted longer if I took the trouble to hold them between my hands for a few minutes each day to magnetize them.

The question of magnetism has long been one of my preoccupations. On the icon shelves of some Gypsy caravans I have often seen religious statues of, for example, Thérèse of Lisieux or Our Lady of Lourdes. The bases of these statues were usually pierced with a metal rod reaching well up into the middle of the statues. These pieces of metal are conducting rods taken from old electrical apparatus. Makers of magnetic talismans prefer not to continue their work if they cannot procure a piece of metal that is apparently essential for them. This must be the same metal that is used in any type of electrical fitting or apparatus as a conductor.

In 1969, at the lighthouse of d'Ailly near Dieppe, the wife of Tjtin de Beauvoisin of the Bouglione Circus, a medium and fortune-teller, asked me to design a talisman for her inspired by the Gypsy signs of the zodiac. This talisman had to contain tiny bits of metal taken from various parts of a group of electrical installations. The difficulty was to get hold of these minute samples—and when she found out this was going to be a very troublesome task, she abandoned the idea.

All this throws a certain light on many Gypsy charms and talismans. The care with which they are put together, following precise and secret rules, indicates that their power is not simply a result of auto-suggestion.

FIFTEEN

THE MASKS OF SERENITY

Man's use of masks is a fairly universal practice. The Africans employ them in all their livelier ceremonials, and they are also associated with a witch doctor's powers. Asian actors use them on stage, or in the form of shadow plays or marionettes. Elsewhere masks are indispensable at funeral ceremonies or for appeasement rites.

The Gypsy has a strange use for masks—a therapeutic one. He tries to help a patient who is mentally sick by presenting him with a model of oblivious but subjective serenity. It goes without saying that the mask possesses quasi-hypnotic powers. It becomes a focus for mental concentration, which, over days, months, or even years, helps to rehabilitate a patient's state of mind. Created especially for the person concerned, it cannot be handed over to anyone else. Showing it in public is absolutely forbidden.

It is curious that the artisan who makes these masks is usually illiterate and his work is purely intuitive. He feels the troubles of his patient more than he understands them, and it is simply by using his extraordinary powers of perception that he is able to make the mask. It is enough for him to meet the person for whom the mask is required, to feel his presence and hear the tone of his voice. This perception is similar to that of clairvoyance or vision in movement. But as mental disorders come from the very depths of the un-

conscious, different methods of treatment are necessary.

Contrary to the psychiatrist, who "looks," the mask doctor "constructs." Not knowing the cause, he is content to try to overcome the effects by a "shock image" capable of fighting whatever is having such a bad effect on his patient's mental health. Like the psychiatrist, the Gypsy sorcerer does not try to treat a patient unless the patient himself is willing. More, perhaps, than any other form of Gypsy therapy, it can resemble putting a spell on someone. As well as the fascination of a personal mask, the sorcerer also counts on the willingness and passivity of the patient, and above all on the impact the mask will have on him when he first sees it. The mask is the materialization or the result the sorcerer hopes to achieve. It is an enigma for which only the patient has the key. Once the mask has been handed over, it is up to its owner to do the rest, if he wants to.

The making of the mask follows a precise ritual which betrays its magical origins. According to the sorcerers, it "starts out from the heavens"—that is, with seven little balls of clay representing the seven planets: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Uranus, Mercury, the sun, and the moon. They also correspond to the seven points of concentration of the look of strange affinity. Incorporated into the mask are nail clippings and hairs belonging to the person for whom it is intended—these are to give an added identification with the owner. This mask, created to give a feeling of inner harmony, is generally rather ugly, asymmetric, and masculine—sometimes it has a beard and always a mustache (plate 13).

The mask is intended to encourage its owner to soliloquize. It does away with the continual dialogue that is a part of any psychiatric session. It is in no way an instrument of investigation. It helps combat effects, the cause of which its creator knows nothing about. This is probably the reason why, in spite of its strangeness and ugliness, the sorcerers call it either "Man of

Peace" or "Man of Wisdom," according to the needs of the patient.

Once the patient is cured, the mask has fulfilled its mission. It is bad to keep the mask after its task is over, because in recalling the past, a new form of neurosis can be created. It should disappear without leaving any trace. Having been made for a single, unique case, it cannot be turned over to a friend to help him out of his troubles. The Gypsy sorcerer has allowed for the natural disappearance of the mask. All that is required is to take it out and place it in a garden one day when there is a heavy rainfall. The rain then does the job of sending the mask back into its natural element, the earth, to be reabsorbed. Only the memory of it will stay with the man for whom it was made.

IV

Love and Sexuality

SIXTEEN

WOMEN AND SEX

"The sands of truth will deposit me on the bed of earth from which I came, and the hands of my brothers will lead me. Naked, I shall return to the womb of my mother."

These were the last words of a *kako* who had escaped Hitler's gas ovens and who rests today less than fifteen miles from Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer.

"The mother's womb" is a phrase that often occurs in a Gypsy's conversation, particularly if he happens to be fond of you. Blaise Cendrars explained to me the importance of the mother of a Gypsy tribe, and added that everything that went on around her resembled the old pagan sex rites. Some tribal mothers, he told me, "have as many sons as they have husbands."

I later found that this was indeed true. At one time the husband of a tribal mother had only one function: to give her children—particularly sons—who would be capable of taking over the leadership of the clan once they were grown up.

But if these children did not please the mother's brothers—if they suffered from any physical or mental handicap—then it was arranged that the husband should disappear as quickly as possible; his death was always either "accidental" or from "natural causes." Then the brothers chose another candidate. If again the children did not appear to be perfect, the tribe would again deplore another "accidental" death.

It was in this way that I knew tribal mothers who had been widowed five times over.

The husband of a mother of the tribe was given board and lodging without having to work—and was usually looked down upon by the rest of the tribe. One wonders what pleasure a tribal mother could have had with her successive husbands when she was only considered to be a "fertile factory of child production." I have even heard tell of tribal mothers whose sexual parts were sewn into a smaller opening better adapted to the sexual dimensions of the husband, so that the latter should feel greater pleasure and the child thus be conceived "in joy."

For the tribal mother an effective and erotic compensation had been worked out—the "coaxer," whose function was precisely that, "to coax and cajole." He was always a young man who had been taken in hand at an early age by the elders of the tribe and conditioned—like the magnetists—to be unaffected by a woman's sexual appeal. Devoid of any sexual desire himself, he was thus able to concentrate completely on his partner's pleasure. He was taught to know all the sensitive and erotic zones of the female body.

In this curious three-sided partnership, the coaxer gave the mother her physical fulfillment without ever penetrating her. Instead, by a combination of caresses, words, and breathing, he made her sufficiently excited to be ready to have an orgasm as soon as her husband took over. An important part of the preparation was the way the coaxer used his hands on the woman's body and breathed regularly on her eyelids while chewing a mouthful of wild mint. I once knew one of these coaxers who at eighty was still a virgin.

These complex practices are part of the privileges of the highly initiated and the tribal chiefs. The majority of Gypsies don't practice elaborate sexual relations. Their impulses are usually simple, instinctive, and more animal than spiritual. The young Gypsy girl doesn't as a rule need any sexual education. There is no point in it. Living at close quarters in a twenty-

five-foot-square caravan where even the parents have very little privacy, the intimate relations of adults are accepted as a matter of course. It does sometimes happen that at the moment of marriage an old woman prepares the fiancée. I have known one who was "dedicated to the moon." That is, she taught worldly wisdom to the young, instructed them in physical love-making, and taught the two sexes how to treat each other in all circumstances. But cases of that sort are exceptional. At one time the older Gypsies taught the adolescents simply by taking examples from nature. "The Gypsy needs to beget offspring," they would say, "for the field of wheat gives more nourishment when it's extended, a pack of wolves will be stronger the more wolves there are, and the nomads will be better able to defend themselves when their numbers are increased."

For the majority of Gypsies the sexual act has no other meaning but procreation. The only thought is to provide children who will carry on the race and strengthen the tribe. Methods of contraception are almost unknown, and a "natural" selection is made of children at birth to eliminate any child obviously deformed or mentally deficient. The worst thing that can happen to a Gypsy woman is to be unable to have any children. A woman who only has two is considered a poor thing. I have a friend of twenty-eight whose wife is twenty-six. They already have eight children but feel deprived because they cannot have any more. The wife's last confinement was difficult, and the doctor has said her life would be in danger if she had another. I see this couple regularly at Saintes-Maries. At midday the man says to the woman, "Come, let's go and pretend to make another child."

It should be explained that the Gypsies have completely different ideas of modesty from the ones we have. For a woman to bare her breast is considered normal and natural, but to show her knee is highly indecent.

"I have two trees planted in the soil, and their

leaves hide the source of life, which belongs to my man," says the Gypsy woman.

"For us, a woman is like the earth," said Little Pierre to me one day. "The earth is our mother, and so is woman. The secret of life comes from the ground, and no one can see into it. With a woman, secrecy stops at the waistline; everything above it can be exposed to view."

The Gypsy woman always wears a long skirt which reaches from her waist to her feet. She will sometimes show her legs when dancing at night around a camp-fire. The lift and rise of her whirling skirts can be taken as an indication of her feeling for a man. But watch out! Anything touching on the sexual life of the clan is very serious and can have grave consequences. Rape is usually punished by death. On the other hand, if a Gypsy girl is seduced by someone of her own tribe, the affair can usually be sorted out between their respective fathers. They consult the *Kriss*. This is a kind of council of elders which determines how much should be paid for the girl's sale. Until that sum is paid, the couple is made to live together, by force if necessary. Once the debt has been paid, they are then free to stay together or not, as they please.

MARRIAGE

In the past, marriages often took place against the wishes of the young couple concerned, for personal feelings were not taken into account by the elders who settled their affairs. Marriage for the gorgio means first and foremost the "couple," while the Gypsy always thinks of the tribe and its survival. Some children are "promised" from birth. This can lead to all kinds of dramas. A girl capable of earning good money and thus helping to support her family is not allowed to marry, even if promised. Instead, one of her sisters who is not a wage earner is put forward in her place.

The marriage proposal is generally made around the

"campfire of law and order." There is a set protocol involving who sits where in the circle that squats around the flames. The fathers bargain together, and finally agreement is reached on the dowry of the young girl, who is usually between fourteen and sixteen years old. Once everything is settled, the preparation for the wedding ceremony starts immediately.

When a young Gypsy wants to marry a girl against the wishes of her parents, there is only one solution open to him: abduction. He runs away with the girl and then faces her parents with the fact that what is done cannot be undone. In some tribes abduction has become such an accepted custom that it is considered almost a part of the nuptial ceremonies and is usually winked at by the rest of the family. Nowadays, Gypsy parents take more heed of their children's wishes in the matter, though marriages between different types of Gypsies is still rare. The daughter of a fairground Gypsy or a circus performer, for instance, is unlikely to marry a Kaldéras, for very practical reasons.

From the age of three or four, each Gypsy child starts to learn his parents' way of life and profession. So a girl acrobat who married a blacksmith would not be considered by the Kaldéras tribe as capable of helping her husband earn a living. If a man of the Kaldéras makes pots and pans, his wife is expected to know how to make jewelry. And what would the daughter of a tinsmith be able to do among a tribe of circus performers? As well as having a professional training that corresponds more or less to her husband's, every Gypsy woman is taught how to tell fortunes. Even if only one in a hundred has a real gift, the rest are taught at least how to read the lines of the hands.

If marriages between Gypsies from different groups pose certain problems, this is doubly true when the union is between a Gypsy and gorgio woman. If a Gypsy woman "sinks so low" as to marry a gorgio who is not accepted by her tribe, she is either excluded

from it, or action is taken against her by her fellow Romanies. There have been exceptions to the general rule, as much for security and protection as for anything else. In England, for instance, Gypsy girls have married noblemen, while the French aristocracy has always protected the nomads. A case in point is the Marquis de Baroncelli at Saintes-Maries. I know Gypsy babies who have been baptized three or four times over, and each time a different but rich and influential gorgio has stood in as godfather!

Marriage feasts, like baptisms, take place at night, around a campfire and with no strangers present. They are extravagant celebrations that go on for as long as the parents' purses hold out. When the old people wake up in the morning, the younger ones who have been feasting all night prudently retire. Usually the food and wine has run out when the elderly arrive, and it is then the custom for them to smash all the crockery in sight, and the feast ends in a pile of rubble and broken dishes. I have seen families have to delay their departure for several days in order to clean up the mess and put their caravans in order. As for the bridal couple, they retire as quickly as possible to their caravan.

I have already discussed the importance of the *diklo* (a woman's virginity) in my earlier book. The morning after the bridal night the sheets stained with blood are hung outside the newlyweds' caravan in order to prove that all is as it should be. Brides who were not virgins used to be repudiated, but nowadays Gypsy bridegrooms are not nearly so demanding.

I must add that *diklo* does not only mean virginity (the hymen) but is also the name given to the scarf every married woman should wear on her head when she goes out. Like the wedding ring of the gorgio, the scarf is a sign the woman is no longer free.

There does exist a variation on the old imposition of "feudal rights," called the "rights of the sprouting sheaf," that were exercised by the tribal chief or by certain chosen women. It is not a question of penetra-

tion, the husband's absolute prerogative, but of a systematic deflowering done with the finger and a folded piece of cloth. Once the *diklo* had been gathered, the spots of blood on the cloth were examined and interpreted. The stains were supposed to foretell either a good or bad future for the couple.

Celibacy is tolerated by the Gypsy community, but it is rare nevertheless. It is accepted that if a man has a very heavy responsibility, he is better off without a wife and children to look after as well. (At one time tribal chiefs had charge of as many as forty or fifty caravans.)

Spinsters are even rarer than bachelors, though it does sometimes happen that a woman has the sole responsibility for the support of her parents, brothers, and sisters. In a case like this, a Gypsy woman is not held to any of the usual rules of the tribe, and is permitted to have casual lovers without censure—unless, of course, they happen to be gorgios.

Polygamy is also something rather exceptional. I did once know a tribal chief whose wife was unable to bear children. With her consent he got another woman pregnant. Since then the three of them have lived happily together, the wife participating in bringing up the children of her husband's mistress. Another chief with a childless wife once openly asked me if I would sell him one of my sons. Naturally, I refused. So, again with the wife's consent, he had a child with another woman. Unluckily, the child was a girl. So finally he adopted a little Indian boy from South America, and the child now bears his name.

DECOCTIONS

Romanies have always had a bad reputation for brewing mysterious potions and drugs. Certainly the *kakos* have a number of recipes for making aphrodisiacs, most of them Oriental. The *Sifrit*, for instance, is a herbal wine which induces hallucinations and can be very dangerous if taken in large doses. Made from

white wine, the rinds of certain fruits, and a cereal which increases the alcohol content, it brings on a state of euphoria very conducive to lovemaking. The women of the Sinti tribe usually take a glass of it when in childbirth to help deaden their pain.

Blaise Cendrars also told me of certain crystals which when burned and inhaled, made one feel very light-headed. This was probably the drug Sandra used when I first met her. Usually, though, the Gypsy prefers to use means other than drugs if he wants to seduce a woman—mesmerizing her with a Look, for instance.

The Gypsies who play flamenco music claim that by playing certain airs, certain notes, they can produce vibrations which intensify the potential of their Look.

There are also decoctions that can be taken to cure impotence, but the *kakos* who make them know very well that their effect is more psychological than medical. In this connection I know of a most original cure which very well illustrates the strange depths of subconscious reaction.

One night, two fathers sitting around a campfire were discussing a marriage between their respective children. As a marriage settlement one father promised the other a mare to which his son was very attached. The wedding took place, and the bridegroom had to hand over his horse to his new father-in-law. The wedding night was a disaster. The following day the young man asked if he might borrow the mare back for a while. He took the horse and disappeared for the rest of the day. That same night he was still unable to make love to his bride. The same sequence of events was repeated day after day until at the end of several weeks the marriage had still not been consummated and the young man had spent the greater part of his time on horseback. The bride, who was very shy, said nothing for a while. But after several months her relatives began to think something must be wrong, as she showed no signs of being pregnant.

Finally, all her patience gone, the girl admitted to

her father that she was still a virgin. The father went to consult a *kako*, who told him to bring the young couple to see him, but separately. He then spent a long time with each of them in turn. The young husband confessed he couldn't understand what was happening to him. He had never had any problem before in his relations with women. But as soon as he approached his wife, he became impotent. The *kako* promised to help him. Right away he asked the girl's father to give him one of her dresses—which was then put into a sack. This was made into an undersaddle for the mare, which was still taken out riding every day by the husband.

A month went by, and the *kako* took back his sack. One day the mare went into heat. The old *kako* advised the young woman to put on the dress that had been under the saddle, and then mount a stallion and ride off to find her husband. The stallion caught up with the mare. The husband and wife were unseated and thrown from their mounts. The stallion promptly mounted the mare and proceeded to service her. It was then that the reluctant husband smelled the odor of his mare on the wife's dress—and immediately threw her onto the grass and made love to her.

SEX BETWEEN GYPSIES AND GORGIOS

Sexual relations between a Gypsy and a gorgio woman can never be placed on the same plane as those of a Gypsy couple. The gorgio is not accorded the respect and privileges which surround the Gypsy woman. From puberty onward the Romany boy is brought up to think a liaison with a gorgio is a safety valve allowed him until his marriage with a woman of his own race. When a Gypsy brags about his sexual exploits, it goes without saying that he is talking about his adventures with gorgios. He would never reveal the secrets of his tribal life.

In the eyes of a Romany, a woman who is not a Gypsy could never be anything more to him than an

object of either lighthearted pleasure or vengeance. So a Manouche, a fairground or circus Gypsy, never thinks he has been unfaithful to his wife if during the course of his regular journeys across France he has had fifty affairs with different gorgios. (But let him beware if ever he casts his eyes on a Gypsy woman other than his wife!)

Fifty affairs is only a very modest estimate of what can happen during a circus tour of two hundred and fifty days. I have known Gypsies who made it a point of honor to sleep with a woman in every town through which they passed. Some of them used their Look technique as a means of seduction, or other methods that a gorgio would find unusual and therefore exciting. I have been astonished by the diversity of these conquests. They included not only the maid but the magistrate's wife, the restaurant keeper and her barmaid, the farm girl and her mistress, the actress on holiday or the wife of a businessman. One Don Juan I knew, who had once been condemned for hitting a policeman, used to make a specialty of seducing the wives and daughters of gendarmes.

Our civilization has managed to destroy the Gypsies' sexual harmony, which for so many years was a major force in their lives. The tribal chiefs seem powerless to stop the gradual rise in the number of broken marriages and divorces. Gypsy girls have even broken off with the Gypsy lovers and run away to live openly with gorgios.

Religion has a certain responsibility for the change of sexual habits. Both Catholic and Protestant missionaries have taught the Gypsies a sense of sin, of which they had been completely ignorant. Some of the Kaldéras clan have even taken to having religious squabbles among themselves.

"My grandson doesn't make love in the same way I used to with his grandmother," grumbled an old Gypsy I met one day sitting on the steps of the arena at Saintes-Maries. "They now do the same sorts of things with their wives that at one time we only did

with a gorgio prostitute. Nothing is sacred anymore. Your race has gradually corrupted them until one day, like you, they will sniff up smoky fumes instead of the good earth. But the earth is our mother, and a good Romany should keep the smell of the earth in his nostrils all his life. How can you feel at home in the belly of the earth if your body no longer remembers the smell of your mother?

"The gorgios only have a memory for words and looks, but the Gypsy also has a memory for smells and scents. Breathing is a manifestation of life, and each breath carries with it the very smell of life. Even the odor of a decaying carcass comes from life."

My own sexual instruction was given me by the tribal chief Jean-Michel Mathias. It took him only a day to sweep away the idea of sin from my mind and to fill it instead with his own ideas of life as he himself lived it. Religious taboos faded to give place to the feeling that sex was as necessary to life as bread and water.

"The first woman who gives herself to you," Mathias said to me that day, "you will remember as if she were your mother, and she will be to you like a well-head of spring water. Drinking deeply at a source when one is thirsty is not a sin, but a necessity for the maintenance of your body. So the soul can live in peace, the body must be quieted. That is why we consider that a thirteen-year-old girl is ripe for love and our boys are men at fourteen. One must *live* our kind of life before trying to understand it."

Hartiss had also said to me, "To understand the life of a caravan dweller, it is no good watching the convoy go past; you must become one of them."

The Gypsies taught me to look on a woman as a nourishment I received and gave back in return. Freed from my religious taboos, I began to live a full life which seemed to be as easy and pleasant as walking in a garden. From watching the way the circus Gypsies behaved on their travels, I became like them, a collector of gorgio girls. As they did, I collected photo-

graphs of the girls I had seduced and pinned them to the walls of my caravan. And at the end of the trip I had thirty-four pinned on the walls. Thirty-four smiles to remind me of the different towns I had passed through.

It was the custom among the young men in the troupe to have a celebration at the end of a tour to count all their conquests while they drank the season's white wine that had just been bottled. This wine had a very potent effect, and the atmosphere got more and more noisy and excited as the number of empty bottles increased. Then someone went out and fetched a big oven dish. All the photos we had been counting up with such pride were piled into it. He then poured a good-sized glassful of kirsch over the lot and set a match to it. The photographs started to burn with a blue flame. A friend of mine turned them over with a fork in the same way one would flip a pancake, until the bits of cardboard shriveled up into a pile of ashes.

The reason behind this strange practice was explained to me by a man named Marcel Rimbart, who although he was a gorgio was accepted by the nomads. He drew me aside to another table and said, "You do not understand their feeling of contempt. I have known those two young men over there—Sacha and Fredo—since they were children. They knew what it was like as kids to have dogs set on them and to be beaten with a whip. They have grown up now, but they haven't forgotten. The blue flames of those pictures of their one-night women is the fire of the backlash. They are following the Gypsy maxim 'If you throw a stone and miss me, I will come and take your daughter. If you hit me, I will take your wife. If you hit my brother, I will take both the wife and daughter.'" Memories of phrases chanted at night by the *kakos* around their campfires came back to me: "I have felt your pitchfork in my back; your wife shall receive mine in her belly."

Another Gypsy friend, Georgio, with whom I used to travel the roads, once said to me, "Each time I make

love to a gorgio girl I give her more pleasure than I receive. I can excite her in ways her own menfolk don't know about. All her life her memory of me will be stronger than mine of a stone thrown in my face." He taught me that if one really wants to possess the power of love, he should always give more than he takes. Sexuality can be used for magical purposes, but this is a sphere of activity reserved for the *kakos*.

FRIENDSHIPS BETWEEN GYPSY MEN AND WOMEN

The Gypsy woman has an important place in the life of a nomad apart from the sexual act. She is, as I have explained before, not only looked up to as a tribal mother, but also someone who helps provide a livelihood for her husband and family. Among the Kaldéras clan, for instance, the men are often seasonal workers and the women keep the home running by telling fortunes. The husband and the wife have different domains in life, which are strictly respected. The husband never interferes with the privacy and personal life of his companion. He would never dream of rummaging about inside the caravan, because this is her domain.

It is therefore perfectly possible for a Gypsy man and woman to have a deep friendship for one another which is completely platonic. There is a typical Gypsy way of sealing a friendship like this. The man suggests to his friend that she collect a root of wild dog rose for the following spring. Then, having fixed a meeting place for the following year, they go their separate ways. From whatever ground the man parks his caravan for the night, he takes a handful of soil and puts it in a sack. To start with, this is easy; but at the end, 365 handfuls of earth make a fairly heavy weight to carry around—particularly as the Gypsy is not supposed to put the sack on the ground when he is throwing in the earth; he has to carry it on his shoulder. When the year is over, he digs a hole at the place where

he has arranged to meet his friend, fills it with his harvest of earth, into which is planted the *Rosa simplex*, symbol of the friendship which links the man to the woman for whom he has performed this rite.

SEVENTEEN

THE JARS OF HARMONY

Of all the different tokens of wisdom I have collected from my Gypsy brothers and sisters, the "jars of harmony" are not only one of the most attractive, they are also efficient. Conceived as a means of achieving a harmonious relationship between a man and his wife, they have proved so effective that if every newly married couple had recourse to the idea, three-quarters of the divorces that take place would never happen at all.

I don't know the origin of the legend, but a very good version of it was given to me one day by "Cora the Manouche," who worked in the stables of the Bouglione Circus.

We have all heard of Romeo and Juliet or Héloïse and Abelard, but do you know the story of Bourso and Marona?

When Marona learned her father had promised her to Bourso and that he was to receive as part of the marital settlement two dozen glasses of Murano crystal, she went to her mother and said, "Bourso wants me for a wife. What will he make of me?"

"A little heap of flesh eaten up with worries," replied her mother.

Marona waited until nightfall and then went to look for Giuseppe, who was setting traps about a mile and a half away.

"Giuseppe," she said, jumping out at him from behind at a moment when he was not expecting to meet anyone. "Giuseppe, Bourso is soon going to have my body. What will he make of me?"

"A little receptable for his pleasure," replied the old man, angry at having been disturbed in his preparations for a night's poaching.

Marona did not sleep well that night, and it seemed to her that dawn was a long time coming. She knew that as soon as it was light Poulquo would be off to the enclosures where the horses were stabled. Hidden under the wheels of the caravan called "Fanny the Wise," she waited for him.

As soon as she saw the shadow of his legs as he passed by the caravan, she reached out from her hiding place and pulled him down beside her. Both of them burst out laughing.

"I didn't hurt you, did I?" said Marona.

"No," said Poulquo, "but you certainly gave me a bit of a scare. What are you doing out at this hour, Marona?"

"I was waiting for you."

"Why?"

"Your cousin Bourso wants me to be his wife."

"Who told you that?"

"His father has gone to Venice to buy two dozen crystal glasses."

"What then?"

"He will then put a golden coin into each glass."

"Bourso must love you very much, Marona, for his father to pay so much for a little girl. And you, do you love him?"

"Yes, but what will he make of me?"

"The servant of his horses."

"That's all?"

"What else do you expect?"

Marona ran off crying and met Sidina, who was already out gathering herbs, for it is well known that when these plants are picked at dawn, their powers are more effective.

"Why are you crying like that, my little flower?" asked the old woman, getting up from where she had been stooping over the grass.

"I would like to be like you. I don't at all want to be what they said."

"And what did they say, little flower?"

"That I would be a heap of rotting flesh, a pleasure box, and a groom."

"Who told you you would be a groom?"

"Poulquo."

"Perhaps Poulquo is wiser than you think, Marona, for the horse knows the hand that soothes and comforts it for the effort it has made. A horse is strength, Marona; without the horse who would pull the caravans? We should be like wolves walking one behind the other. Just think, Marona, how could we possibly manage without horses?"

"But, Sidina," replied Marona, "the drays are a man's job, not a woman's."

"The drays are the concern of the chief, and no one else. My mother was the mother of her tribe, and she groomed the four horses who pulled her caravan. Why don't you want to do what my mother did?"

"But why do you want me to do it?"

"So you don't become a little heap of rotting flesh."

"I won't be a little pleasure box, either?"

"Yes, of course you will, if you construct from love a casket for yourself. Listen to what I say, Marona. Go to your mother and tell her you will not marry unless your father-in-law brings you, as well as the two dozen glasses, two simple jars of earthenware or colored glass, one painted red, the other blue. You will also need a large sackful of seeds of all colors: haricot beans, both large and small; butter beans, lentils, the light colored and the dark; broad beans; peas; chick peas; split peas; maize; corn; oats; peppercorns, the white and the black; barley; sunflower seeds; hempseed; and aniseed. Go, tell your mother that Sidina, the herb Gypsy, told you all this and that with it I will build your happiness."

Four days later, Bourso placed on the old woman's table two earthenware jugs—one blue, the other red. Behind him Marona paused on the top step of the caravan and said, "I've also got the bag of seeds."

"Well done, little flower. Come in and sit down beside Bourso and listen to Sidina. I will give you the secret of the happiness that was mine until the day my old Melitto laid down his bones in the moving sands of the Camargue."

The old woman looked from one to the other sadly; then her brow cleared and a faint smile appeared on her face. She said, "These two jars are the jars of your life, my children, and the seeds in the sack are your future days together, marked with the sorrows and joys you will bring each other. You are quick-tempered, Bourso; beware of your temper, for it can kill love. Remember that your wife, who looks after the horses, is the mistress of her caravan."

"I will look after the horses, old woman," said Bourso, nodding his head.

"The head of the household must protect everything that sleeps both outside and inside the caravan. The horse, the dog, and the cat are the first sons of your family, Bourso, until the day you have planted your seed in Marona's womb. The time is near at hand, Marona, when you will no longer be a little flower, but a plant like the lily of the valley—with little bells all around you. And if you know how to use these two jars as Melitto and I did during our lifetime, then your life together will be as happy as ours."

Bourso and Marona looked at the old woman. Then Bourso took hold of Marona's hand, and she took his. Old Sidina clasped hers together as if she were praying.

Across the arched ceiling of the caravan hung bunches of dried herbs tied together with horsehair and slung from one window to the other. Sidina kept silent for a while; then she started to speak again.

"The red jar is yours, son, because red means strength. The other is yours, little flower, for blue is

the color of tranquillity. Every day of your life from now on will be collected in your jar. The jar will keep all your secrets until seven moons have passed. Then each of you has the right to learn the secrets of the other.

"Each seed has a different meaning: The broad bean is happiness and mutual harmony. The light-colored lentil is tranquillity; the dark lentil, a slight annoyance. The haricot bean is the bad one; a red haricot striped with white is anger, and the white haricot, worry. The big butter bean, the one we call the cock's kidney, is despair, and the little round one is sadness.

"Do take care not to have too many haricots in your jar. It is a sad slave plant the gorgios like to eat. It's not like the maize plant that sings in the sun."

"So what do we do with the jugs?" said Marona.

"You do what I have just told you. Day by day each of you puts a seed into your own jar which corresponds to the kind of day you have spent. You continue to do this until seven moons have passed. At that time you each empty the other's jar, and by the light of the icons you each count up the amount of joy and sorrow you have inflicted on the other.

"The day when your count reveals that you have a majority of broad beans and good lentils, is the time when you will be on the threshold of complete harmony together. At that time, if it happens, you will not really need the jars anymore for the same purpose but can fill them with flowers from your garden. Happiness be with you and your family, my children."

"Will it take us a long time?" asked Bourso.

"It took Melitto five years to overcome his anger. But the day he discovered that the jar I held out to him contained mostly broad beans and pale lentils—with, I must confess, a few red haricots streaked with white—that day Melitto knew we were linked together body and soul and no exterior force could separate us."

"But you haven't told us the secrets of the other seeds, Sidina."

"Those secrets, my children, are your own. You give your own meaning to each of the different types of seed you have—so that only the two of you will be able to interpret the sense."

After having told me this story, Cora the Manouche (or as some people called her, "Cora the Witch," for she had only one eye and loved cats) looked at me with her one eye and said, "What do you think of my story?"

"If one day I write a book, Cora, I will put down what you have told me."

EIGHTEEN

THE FIANCÉES OF THE SHADOWS

*The shadow is the only positive
That can create light.*

*The fiancées of the shadows
Are to the Gypsy who encounters them
The same as an object is to light,
A necessity.*

*For the object creates the shadow
Like a memory of time that has been.*

—Pietro Hartiss
September 1953

Some Gypsy sorcerers have encounters with women that are outside the ordinary run of experiences and to which they attach a particular importance. An affair between a *kako* and a *gavalie* (a "fiancée of the shadows"), a lover who is hidden from the world,

bears no resemblance to an ordinary amorous adventure.

According to Hartiss, it is provoked by a subtle emotional shock that always happens suddenly and is both irresistible and inexplicable. The two people concerned feel the same mutual attraction without a word being exchanged and always without knowing the other's identity.

Long ago Sandra talked to me about my future life and loves. "Two of the most beneficial things in life are love and friendship," she said. "Love is the stronger of the two. It can sometimes destroy friendship, and to exist at all it must be faced with opposition. Day is against night, drought against rainfall, man is against woman, and one never marries *with* someone but *against* them. For life in any form is born from opposition. One day the jar of your life will flow into the jar of someone else's life. It will gush out from you because it is overflowing. You will understand this one day when the time is ripe.

"We are made up, you and I, of three different parts—the destructible, which will perish one day; the indestructible, which never dies; and the third, the invisible, which links the other two.

"In some religions this third body is represented by an aureole or a sun placed behind the heads of statues and images. The statue stands for the perishable body, while the aureole symbolizes the link between body and soul.

"The disciplines the *kako* imposes on himself are essentially aimed at developing his psychic forces, and these forces should never exceed the flow which rules our two lives, the one that perishes and the one that stays. When the measure is full, the surplus has to be got rid of in order to maintain a proper equilibrium. So the *kako* pours his 'stardust' [semen] into the body of a *gavalie*. This woman will pass one day along the road of your life and will receive and clasp your overflowing force within her.

"Do not smile at what I am saying, Pierre, for very

few men of your race are given the opportunity to acquire the knowledge we possess, and our learning is greater than you imagine."

It was Hartiss who explained to me the "technical" side of these mysterious encounters.

"The fiancées of the shadows only have relations with bachelors," he told me. "Married men have a regular release for their energy and life force within the bodies of their wives. Very few Gypsy sorcerers marry, so during their lifetimes they give the spill-over of their psychic force to the *gavalies*. As this happens only rarely, they accumulate and release a greater burst of fluid than a married man. The latter has a continual release for the excess energy within him.

"There are two ways a man can discharge the force inside him. The first is the permanent one. If the *kako* is married it flows from him like a calm river. The second is more tumultuous and can be compared to a torrent swollen with melting snow. It is an overpowering force, life at its fiercest and most exalted.

"The *kako* only lets go of the force within him in order to maintain the level of serenity and calm necessary for the practice of his special powers. For the *gavalie* it is simply a lucky chance if she happens to find herself one day planted in the path of a *kako*, like a bee drawn to a flower.

"The encounter is always sexual and can last either one or two days, sometimes even as long as a month. It never ends with a breach or disagreement, but simply by the disappearance of one or the other. The woman is always young, rarely more than twenty-five, and unknown to the *kako*, who may be, and often is, twice her age. She is sometimes a virgin. After intercourse has taken place, both experience a trancelike feeling of complete mental calm.

"But, take care! You must be prudent. Never keep any object which has belonged to a *gavalie*. And never go back of your own accord to the place where she vanished from your eyes. If you go against these rules you risk trouble. But if, on the contrary, you go back

by chance to the place where she disappeared, peace will fill your soul, and in the space of a second you will seem to be living in an enchanted garden.

"The *gavalies* only leave their traces in your mind. The spot where they left you can produce an extraordinary emotional feeling quite different from anything one can imagine. One gets a strange sensation which is completely bewildering. I have felt it, and it is an experience which is very hard to convey.

"I once sensed it very strongly near one of the newspaper kiosks at the Gare du Nord in Paris, where indeed I did see one of these mysterious fiancées for the last time. Whenever chance takes me back to the spot, I always experience the same sensation of calmness and serenity.

"One day," continued Hartiss, "my uncle took over the responsibility of the convoy from the old tribal chief, who was ill. It was around the year 1910, and I had just cured the daughter of a glassmaker from Murano, near Venice, of gangrene. Her leg had been caught between two gondolas. I treated the gangrene with clay plasters, and her leg was saved from amputation.

"The father of this young girl worked for the Vatican, and also created unique pieces of glassware which were given as official gifts by the Italian government.

"My uncle had promised me that one day he would take me to Granada to meet the *kako* Renaldo, a palmist of great reputation. Renaldo was a pure-blooded Gypsy. He was descended through his mother from the tribes that haunt the Route de la Plata, the ancient Roman way leading to the Spanish silver mines. So we set out, but the road between Venice and Granada is a long one, and my uncle insisted I help him with all the tasks that fell to the leader of a convoy.

"At that time the caravans were only wagons roofed with canvas, or often just simple peasant carts

covered with reeds. Each day's journey was an adventure, as we had a constant fight for survival against men who thought of us as the scum of the earth.

"For at that time, Pierre, the men of your race were wilder than they are today. They had little in the way of entertainment, and the sight of a Gypsy convoy was for them both a spectacle and a source of contempt. One had to try by devious means to avoid the stones cast at us from all sides.

"The children, hidden behind sacks slung across the bars of the wagon wheels, used to pretend to be dogs barking furiously. When this happened we would be accused of keeping underneath our caravans a pack of wolves trained to attack their sheep.

"I experienced all that when I was young, Pierre. Sometimes we would have to travel at night, stopping at dawn to make camp. We used to leave again in the evening, a few hours after sundown. One night, just before entering a village, we passed in front of the open door of an inn. Through the doorway I saw a young girl going from table to table serving customers. Rooted to the spot, I was unable to take my eyes off her. Coming toward me, my uncle put the handle of his whip in front of my eyes. As I turned my head toward him I saw him smile. He said to me, 'You know the road. The sea is always on your left. Keep this horse and join us later. Guildo will replace you. Here, take this.' And he handed me his purse.

"I knew my uncle well; he had taught me a lot. I vaguely understood that his gesture had some particular meaning, but I was in such a confused state, nothing seemed very real. Before he left me, my uncle put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'When you are left alone, the bottom of that purse will tell you what to do.'

"An hour later, sitting at one of the tables in the inn, I had forgotten everything else but the girl. She went from table to table serving the different cus-

tomers, and from time to time our eyes met. I can't remember what she looked like exactly; I can only recall she was tall and moved well, and that our encounter was a good thing for both of us.

"If one day chance puts a *gavalie* in your way, you must remember that you have the power to make her bloom.

"A peasant has just as much scorn for the word *nomad* as we have for the word *peasant*—and yet, the *gavalies* are always peasant girls, never Gypsies. When we have filled them with our bodily force, they change, become gayer and stronger, their whole bearing is different. There are many incomprehensible things, Pierre, that we don't fully understand. But listen to the end of my story . . .

"One morning the door of the stables opened, and in came the innkeeper. You know a Gypsy never leaves his horse at night, and I slept in the stables. He seemed surprised to see me. 'That's funny,' he said, 'I thought it was with you she had run off!' The girl had disappeared. The innkeeper's niece had found her room empty, and no one knew what had happened to her. I stayed three more days at the inn, and although everyone around me still talked about her, I began to forget what she looked like.

"Then I suddenly remembered my uncle's purse. I emptied it out to look in the bottom. It was a skin pouch, but the bottom was of hard leather. Shaking out the last coins, I saw a design cut into the leather, a bramble leaf with a cross drawn over it. I recognized the sign of the *gavalies*. My uncle's intuition was right. I must now be on my way. Seven days later I rejoined the tribe.

"Fifty years later, when I had almost forgotten she had ever existed, her memory came back to me with such force that I almost felt like a young man again.

"That night, Pierre, for just a moment, a half century dropped away from me. Do you know where I was when this happened? I was on the autoroute

from Paris to Marseille. Stones, tar, and concrete covered the spot where we had been together, but our encounter of fifty years before had kept its secret force."

NINETEEN

THE OCCULT COUPLE

Among the sexual practices of the Gypsies, there is an elaborate ritual that governs the courtship and union of a man and a woman who both have exceptional powers. The relationship of this "occult couple" is temporary. Its sole object is to bring the powers of both partners to fruition, to induce a sort of fermentation of the psychic energies that are latent in everyone but active only in certain exceptional natures.

The protagonists must consummate their union between the rising and setting of the sun at a given time of year with special regard to the lunar cycle. It may happen that the couple must wait ten or eleven months after their meeting before being able to copulate, for the sexual coupling can only be beneficial if the occult ritual has been fully observed beforehand.

This strange marriage rite has its roots in the ancient ceremonies of witchcraft. Just as there can be no Catholic Mass without bread and wine, so the occult couple must have bread and wine to complete their wedding.

The ritual can be broken down into three phases: first comes the psychic preparation, then the meal,

and finally the sexual union. For the psychic preparation three apples are used, each cut in a different way. These fruits are then read according to the way they are cut. In Plate 14 the apple at the top has been cut in two horizontally, and one can see that nature has inscribed in its core a five-pointed star, the "star of knowledge." The center apple has been cut vertically from top to bottom and is an image of the couple. The half with the stem represents the man—or, rather, the man's penis and testicles (to the left and right of the core). The core and pips in the other half bear a resemblance to the woman's genital organs—the position of the ovaries, the uterus, the vagina, and finally the outline of the buttocks.

The cut of the third apple is designed in such a way that when the two parts have been put together again, the fruit is completely whole once more and can be tossed up in the air like a ball.

The three apples represent the spirit (the star), the body, and the element that joins the two together, the "tie." The apple is in itself a sexual symbol, the act of sex being a "nourishment." As the Gypsies say:

One day I will meet you
And you will see me.
Having seen me
You will eat me.
For I am nourishment.

This prelude to the feast, a sort of appetizer, is not swallowed unceremoniously. There is an "act of eating" that takes place before and after the sexual act.

The sorceress brings the fruit to the sorcerer, but it is he who prepares the apples and offers them to her. The art is in knowing exactly where to sink one's teeth. The apple in the middle of the picture has to be bitten through in one single bite. The one at the bottom needs a more subtle procedure: first the man and the woman bite into the apple; then it

is reassembled, and each takes a bite out of it alternately until there is nothing left.

I am your nourishment,
You are mine.
We are the feast.

The remaining apple, the five-pointed star, is eaten after sexual intimacy has taken place and only if each partner has attained fulfillment.

Seven accessories are needed for the celebration of a psychic marriage: a bunch of cock feathers, an unused wax candle, two doves, some hawthorn blossom, several sprigs of gorse, a glass of wine, and a loaf of bread in a basket (plate 15). Cock feathers are used by the Gypsies to keep away evil spirits in the same way Catholics use holy water. The flame of the candle is to them what the Holy Spirit is to Christians, but a different symbol is used because the Gypsies look on the dove—the Christian emblem of the Holy Ghost and of peace—as the image of murder, blood, and madness. So the two doves are ritually killed by the occult couple and their blood spilled.

A string with a slipknot is tied around the neck of each bird. Then a tree is chosen with two branches facing each other. The strings are tied to the branches and the birds are perched on them. The first bird to fly will be hanged; the second will then have its head cut off with a hatchet—the two deaths representing the main modes of capital punishment since remote antiquity. The right wing is removed from the female bird and the left from the male. The doves are then plucked and cooked. The man and woman consume some bread and wine before eating the doves. The man eats the female dove and vice versa.

The table is dressed like an altar. The wings of the two sacrificial birds are placed on a bed of hawthorn and gorse, "the flowers that defend themselves when one tries to pick them." This symbolism of defense is further supported by the cock feathers, which are a

sign of strength. The flame of the candle, as well as lighting the table, is a symbol of clairvoyance. During the meal the bride and bridegroom do not speak; they only look at each other. As both of them are masters of the art of the Look, their possession of one another is initially achieved through an exchange of fixed glances. This is a dangerous game, for as both of them have the power to read the other's thoughts, the emotion at this point can become so intense it can cause a heart attack.

The last phase of the occult marriage is the sexual act itself. This follows laws and disciplines akin to certain forms of Yoga, notably the Tantra-Yoga (Tantrism), in which copulation is used as a physical support for mental concentration. The Gypsies undoubtedly brought this ritual with them from India. But if the technique corresponds more or less exactly to that practiced in the East, the objective is not the same. For the Gypsy, occult coition is a means of increasing psychic powers. The Yogi considers this special form of copulation useful but secondary to his essential search, which is for transcendence.

The position of the couple during the sexual act is of prime importance. It is no coincidence that one finds this position described in the *Kama-Sutra* and carved on the facades of Hindu temples. The couple must not be guided by sexual desire. They must act their parts in a calm, concentrated way, rather as though they were spectators of their own performance. Any feeling of passion has to be restrained. There should be no eagerness or excitement; on the contrary, there has to be a rigorous control over the breathing and all the muscles of the body. The whole procedure is very far removed from common sexual relations. For the Gypsy sorcerers, who were, of course, ignorant of pornography, eroticism in the sexual act was not a necessity but a condiment which enhanced the flavor of the nourishment that was an indispensable part of a man's life. The additional

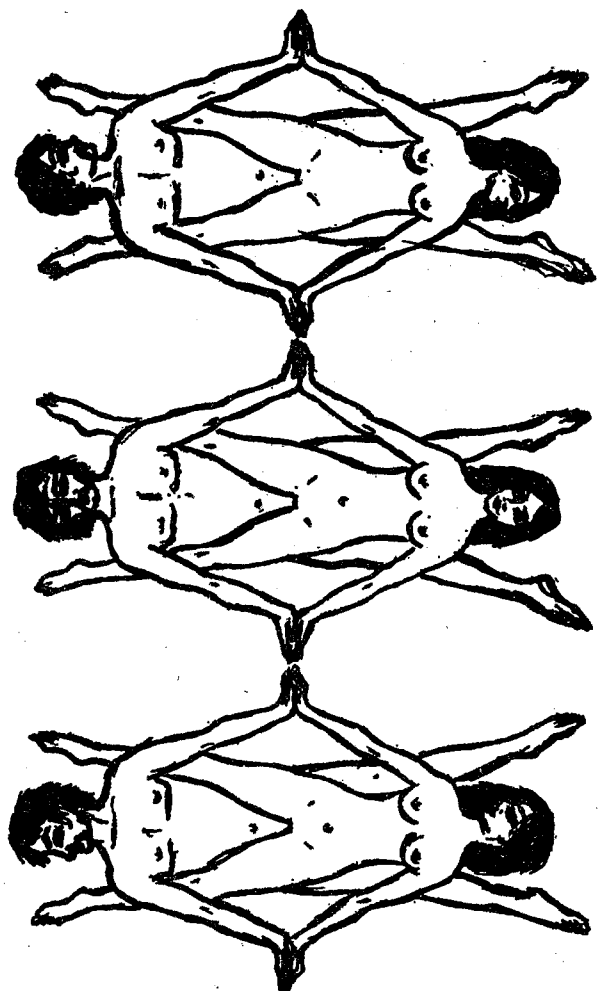


Figure 17. Positions of copulation

pleasure it gave was considered beneficial in that it magnified a perfectly natural act.

Both partners in the "occult position" must have complete mastery over what they are doing (fig. 17). To achieve their mutual objective, both need to have the power of the Look, to be able to read each other's thoughts, and also to be Fire Masters—all necessary for the full control of the sexual instinct. They must be completely nude. No jewelry can be worn, and the woman must not have applied makeup, lipstick, or nail polish. The actual spot chosen is also important; it should resemble as closely as possible a "fairy ring," a circular forest clearing carpeted with grass, herbs, and wild flowers. The man should have as close contact with the ground as possible. His neck, backbone, and heels should be as one with the earth beneath him. The woman has to try to *avoid* contact with the ground insofar as is humanly possible. She has to be more or less supported by the man. Both fix their eyes on the stars.

As soon as their hands are linked, their bodies must stay immobile. Their breathing is synchronized by the mutual pressure of their hands. It must be remembered that magnetists look upon the hands and sexual organs as channels for their magnetic fluid. This pressure of the hands, one against the other, brings all the muscles of the body into play. For the man, the art is to hold back his orgasm to the very limit of his willpower, with moments of rest provided by the rhythm of his muscular contractions. The woman lets herself be carried away both by the body of her partner and by her own inner desire for physical and psychic appeasement.

This strange nuptial couch is oriented according to the median between the sun's rising and setting. The man's nude back pressing against the earth is a search for the "serpent of life"—that is, for communication with the earth's vibrations. The couple must turn their faces every so often toward the rising or the setting sun to give them a notion of the passing

of time. When their gazes are directed at the sky, as is the case most of the time, a vertical line is created which acts as a counterweight to the horizontal position of the man's body on the earth.

The sexual act usually lasts between two and five hours. It leaves the woman completely exhausted, and she is only fit to resume her daily life at the next new moon. The couple remains in a state of exceptional lucidity for a week after their union. Once their occult marriage has been concluded, they separate and never meet again.

V

Secret Signs and Words

TWENTY

THE LANGUAGE OF HANDS

The scene of my first lesson on "talking hands" was at the auction rooms on Paris's rue Drouot in 1957. The occasion was a more than usually tense sale of antique furniture. Few people realize that certain Gypsy families transform themselves from time to time into zealous antique dealers. These clans, which are well organized and generally prosperous, live in their traditional caravans. But when the time for work arrives, our bohemians turn themselves into perfect businessmen. They are unsurpassed in the art of winking out old chests of drawers, wall clocks, or settees from their hiding places in suburban attics. This leads to inevitable and frequent clashes, like the battles of mafiosi, between Gypsies and professional antique dealers, who have been known to forbid the Gypsy buyers access to the auction rooms, forcing the Gypsies to use intermediaries for their most important purchases.

That day we had a rendezvous with a man called Rabuttin and three Gypsies. Rabuttin was not a Gypsy. His visiting card read, "G. Rabuttin, official rag-and-bone man for the auction rooms of the Hotel Drouot, Paris." He was waiting for us at the bar opposite the doors of the hotel.

"I think it's going to work," he said, unstrapping an accordion from his shoulder. "But the dealers in the hall are suspicious of me. I shall be outside near the door. I have friends among the staff. And what

they've done is to put a cupboard with a double mirror between me and the auctioneer. He won't see me, but I shall be able to see the objects as they come up for sale."

"Good—and the signs?"

"We'll use the traditional ones," said one of the Gypsies.

"Why?" asked Hartiss, who was plainly far from pleased.

"Because the gorgios can't make head or tail of them, and my brothers and I know them backwards."

"And Rabuttin?"

"We've taught him how to use them."

"And the 'vow of silence'?"

The three Gypsies—they were brothers, I learned later—seemed to freeze. Then, rising to their feet, they all turned their eyes in the direction of the old man. Hartiss remained seated and stretched out his hand. He placed two extended fingers on the rim of the glass of the man who had answered his questions. As if in response to an unspoken order, the three men sat down again like three schoolchildren who had been reprimanded by their teacher. I watched the hands of the old man. As for Rabuttin, he seemed in no way surprised to be watching this strange conversation. He waited with his accordion on his knees for it to be over.

When Hartiss spoke it was in a voice of surprising sadness. "The end also has a beginning, my son. The start of death is the last breath of life. To lift the veil of secrecy is to wield the dagger of massacre. It is to open the door to the rats which feed on the fruits of your harvest."

"Don't exaggerate," said Rabuttin. "You 'know' me."

"I do, but they do not," answered Hartiss. "The old knowledge is slipping away from them, and the ritual signs will no longer be bearers of light if lizards use them to deceive the gorgios."

"Did you say 'lizards,' Pietro?"

"I said 'lizards,' my sons. Because only the lizard puffs himself up in the rays of the sun. He is as fragile as crystal. Nothing can stop the stream from reaching the river. There are streams that grow polluted, my sons, and yours is one of them."

All six of us lunched at a small restaurant in the rue Drouot. At the end of the meal the three brothers and Rabuttin left us, and I stayed behind alone with the old man. We looked into one another's eyes and were silent. His moustache was not as black as in the old days; time had begun to streak it with white. And a white lock of hair fell across his forehead from under the brim of the hat from which, as in the past, he could never be parted.

"Pierre," he said suddenly, "ever since I learned to read I have never been as happy as I was in the old days. But I have learned a lot in the books you lend me. I find strange things—like the string signs."

"The string signs?"

"Yes, the strings found in Mexico in the cities of the Incas who have been dead a long time."

"And so?"

"I have learned that no one has yet been able to decipher their meaning."

"And what has that got to do with the scene you made just now?"

"It's important, my son." Leaning toward me, he whispered, "We also have strings, and the same experts who can't decipher those in Mexico are equally incapable of reading ours."

"Why?"

"Because on one side there are the Incas and us—and on the other there are the gorgios."

"And we are always the idiots," I said, laughing.

"No, my son, not idiots—just uninstructed. For I think the Incas were like us in that they had to defend themselves against a lot of things. But just imagine that three Incas revealed their secret to a gorgio. Then the secret is a secret no longer, for the gorgio is talkative. In less than two months, dear boy,

Rabuttin—who is my friend and who will remain my friend—will possess the code of a hand language that no auctioneer, no antique dealer can as yet decipher. You get it?"

"Yes, I get it."

"This sign language, dear boy, I am going to let you into its secrets so that you can one day explain to the gorgios what it was used for. I shall do the same with the string when the time comes. There are two sorts of language of the hands. One is used for serious matters, and it would be unworthy to employ it for money grubbing. You will keep it to yourself, because it is sometimes used in courtrooms. When one of us is arrested for poaching, the rest of the tribe assists him from the back of the courtroom. The chiefs indicate to him what tactics to use, what answers to give in his defense. Sometimes, too, they convey to the accused the verdict of the council of the elders, a verdict which takes precedence over that of the gorgios. The other set of signs is used for business deals, and you are at liberty to make them known at any time."

That day Hartiss explained to me at length the language of hands, with special emphasis on its origins among the Gypsy horse dealers before the trade in secondhand cars superseded the trade in horses. I learned, for example, that to hold one's cigar between the thumb and second finger with the hand extended horizontally, palm upward, means "Wait for an offer" (plate 16A). The hand turned and cigar lowered over the ashtray means "Think it over" (16B). The cigar pointed horizontally like a finger between the thumb and first two fingers means "Attack" (16C). The cigar held between the three fingers and the little finger means "Let him talk—wait" (16D). The cigar held vertically between the thumb, forefinger, and the palm of the hand means "Careful—danger" (16E). The cigar in the same position pointing upward held by all the fingertips means "It's a trap" (16F). The cigar pointing downward between the thumb and the

middle finger means "Wait for another offer" (16G). The cigar held normally between the index and the middle finger means "It's okay—buy" (16H).

Two months later, Rabuttin came in search of me at the Manouche, a nightclub at 13 rue Mazarine in Paris, where I was the master of ceremonies. He asked me to lunch with him. Old Hartiss had left for Aigues-Mortes in Provence, so we lunched alone. At the end of the meal Rabuttin's calling proved too strong for him, and he persuaded me to accompany him to the Drouot auction rooms. His staff, all former members of the Foreign Legion, surrounded him like watchdogs. That day I understood Hartiss's friendship for this city adventurer. A former Legionnaire, Rabuttin had brought the battling spirit of the desert fighters into the Paris auction rooms. It was strange to see this little man, his accordion draped around his shoulders, surrounded by a group of tattooed giants. In public rooms crammed with furniture they lived by the same rules as in their desert fortresses, where the friend of your friend was also your friend.

I remember the day when the Legionnaires brought home five yards of gold embroidery. They had found it concealed in the false bottom of one of a pile of old packing cases they were breaking up for burning. The treasure was passed from hand to hand. It was heavily encrusted with gold oak leaves and acorns; the acorns were so elaborately stitched that they appeared to be made of solid gold. There were five Legionnaires at the scene of the find with Rabuttin, Hartiss, and me. Ten days later, around a dinner of roasted lamb, Rabuttin distributed in eight equal parts the money won from the sale of the embroidery.

Many impressive men have crossed my path, but I thank destiny for bringing me into contact with men like these.

Today old Rabuttin is dead and his legionnaires are scattered to the four corners of the earth in search of adventure. Sometimes when I pass the Hotel

Drouot I make a nostalgic detour through the auction rooms. In all the codes used by the buyers I have never found a single sign that comes from the hand language of the Gypsies. The old accordionist took the secrets of his friends into the grave with him.

TWENTY-ONE

THE CALENDAR AND THE NOTION OF TIME

The steam sang in the kettle. The curtain had fallen back over the open doorway. I could no longer see the desolate landscape. The factory wall had disappeared. Three men sat in the dark caravan talking over the tea cups—an old Gypsy, Hartiss, and myself.

The old man turned to me and said, "I am called Pablo. Our own people say Old Pablo. Those close to me say the Old Boy. What am I to you?"

"You are the brother of my brother."

"And your brother is mine, my son."

For a while he seemed lost in thought. I have always been struck by the beard and the hair of Gypsies when they have reached the age of the patriarchs. Pablo could have been Hartiss's brother. They had the same bright, distant eyes.

"I am going to show you something," said Pablo, placing in front of me a piece of cardboard covered with drawings. He smiled, sat down beside me, and said, "These signs represent the division into three groups of one of the twelve months of the year, whether of thirty or thirty-one days does not matter. It is from this that the Gypsies compose their calendar. The exact numbering of days is not to be found there,

because for that form of reckoning the civilization of the gorgios must be taken as a point of departure, and all that touches the gorgios is tinged with hatred.

"I shall give you the secret of our calendar. It is from there you will compose the sign that should be carved on your personal talisman. Neither I nor Hartiss will give you the answer. You, alone and unaided, will create a talisman. You will have the right to reproduce it in any existing metal, but never more than twelve times with any one of them, for to overstep that mark would be to destroy the harmony that has come down to you from the souls of your predecessors."

"Hartiss," I said, "here I am once again plunged in a magic I do not understand."

"Come on, Pierre," said Hartiss. "Ask Pablo questions. That was our reason for inviting you."

"Of course, that is why you are here," declared the old man, laughing and nudging Hartiss with his elbow.

Hartiss slapped his thigh and said proudly, "I told you he was like that."

"Just as stubborn as you are—a real mule," said the old man. "And just to look at him you wouldn't know it."

They were standing up now, laughing out loud. I let the storm of gaiety blow over and sat with my head between my hands looking at my twisted reflection in the copper samovar.

"You know, he's right," said Pablo, sitting facing me once again. "He is right and wrong at the same time. He gets worked up over some shady deal he thinks I am about to unfold to him. And yet I have said nothing yet."

"It's true," said Hartiss, placing a hand on my shoulder. "You remember, Pierre, a long while ago I told you not to do any more crossword puzzles? They are good mental gymnastics for some men, but not for you."

"Of course I remember, Pietro. But what has that got to do with it?"

"Well now, listen, watch, and remember until your hands are able to cast your thoughts into the form of a talisman. When that happens you will have produced a harmonious shape that comes straight from the heart. It will be the fruit of your unknown brothers who, in order to live in secret, far from your kind, invented what follows."

It was thus that Hartiss and Pablo revealed to me the secrets of the Gypsy calendar and of the different signs used to "fix time" ideographically. I realized that the elaboration of this system was not wholly designed for practical ends, but could also serve as a magical prop.

Still to this day many of the Gypsies who have been spared the influence of our overwhelming civilization have no notion of time. They live in an eternal present. There are some who do not even know their date of birth. When, on May 30, the Gypsies say farewell at the close of their annual reunion at Saintes-Maried-la-Mer, some say to me, "Until tomorrow, my brother." I know they are giving me a rendezvous for the following year. Many gypsies do not know when their own children were born. Out of one hundred living the real nomadic life, there are perhaps two who can use a watch or a calendar. For the Travelers, a watch is nothing but a machine that runs after the moon and the sun. Figures are completely strange to them. They no more count the hours that pass than some people count the money they make.

The dividing up of the day depends on a certain number of natural phenomena. So dawn is "the hour when the horse neighs"—for the horse wakes at the same time as man. Then comes "the hour when the dog barks." When it is "the hour when the duck flies over," it is time to light the fire for the meal. The evening is divided into "the hour of the mosquitoes," then "the hour of the tree frog." It is then time to light the night fire, the "fire that one sees," a fire which is not merely for cooking but which must be good to look at. It should be lighted by a specialist, a "man of fire."

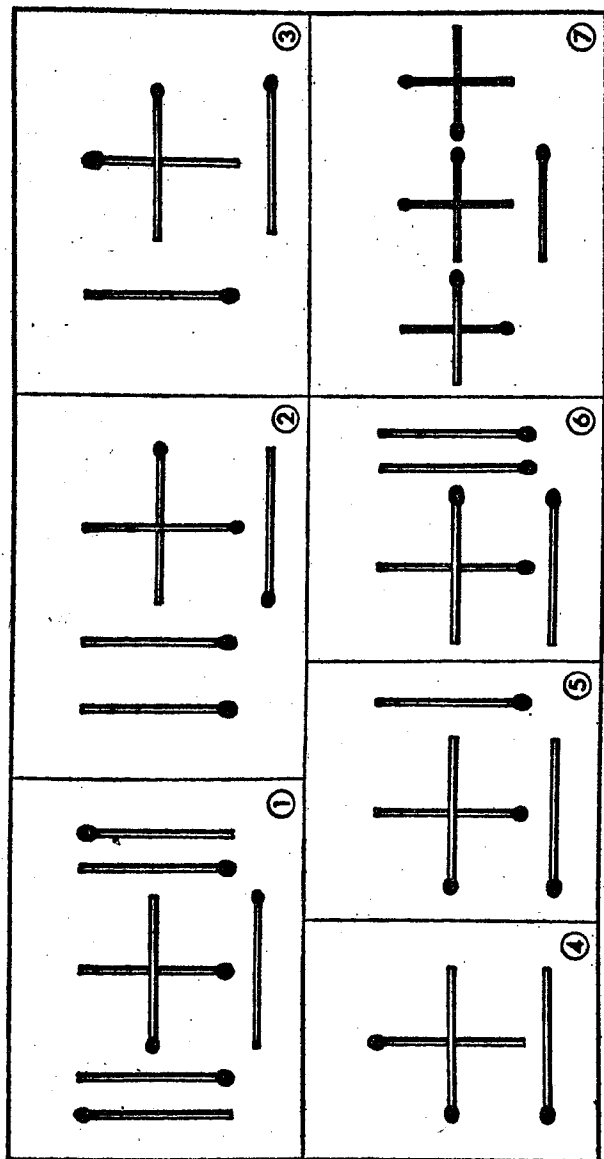


Figure 18 The Days

The beginning of the night is "the hour of the glow-worm."

So the precise notion of hours, minutes, and seconds so essential to the gorgios is unknown among the Gypsies. They go to bed when they are tired and get up when they are rested. The sun and moon rule the days. And days have no names. The Gypsy knows if he is at the beginning, the middle, or the end of a month by the waxing or waning of the moon. But to fix their meetings with other tribes, the Travelers have over the centuries worked out a system of clear and simple signs. This system consists of a combination of short horizontal or vertical lines which can be drawn in sand, written with chalk, or marked out with sticks.

The number seven (the seven planets) is the basis of all the secret signs of the Gypsies. So the system needs only seven lines (fig. 18).

The completed month is represented by a cross above a horizontal line flanked at either side by two vertical lines (fig. 18-1). But this sign is never used. The Gypsies prefer 18-6, which represents the end of the month—the days after the twenty-second.

Figure 18-2 represents the first week of the month; 18-3, the second week; 18-4 the halfway point of the month (around the fifteenth); 18-5 the third week; and 18-7, the quarter—a three-month period. The cross over the horizontal line indicates the direction in which a sign is to be read.

The Gypsies often have recourse to more mysterious signs, which are used for the most part by goldsmiths in making magic charms. The majority of the Travelers have no knowledge of astrology. However, they do know the signs of the zodiac, which they have transposed into their own ideographical language. No attention is paid to the overlapping fractions of the month to which the signs of the zodiac correspond. Capricorn means simply January; Aquarius, February; Pisces, March; and so on. In the Romany interpretation of the zodiac the moon is present every-

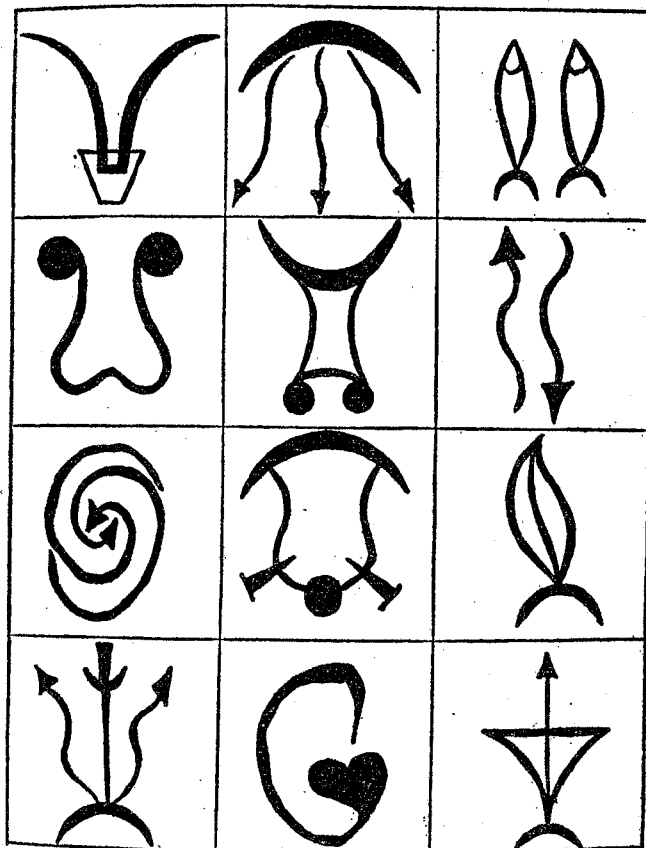


Figure 19. Signs of zodiac

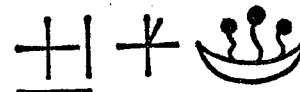
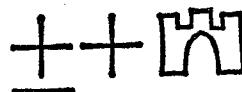
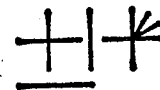
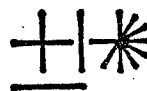
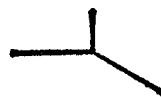
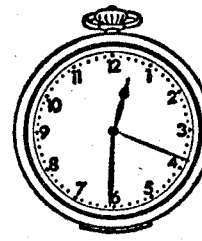
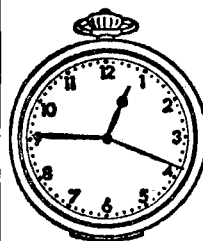
where, either full or as a crescent. Gemini and Cancer are exceptions. I was never told the reason for this, and the meaning of these symbols is still kept secret.

However, I know the significance of Taurus, the bull, in whose sign the moon is represented three times. This crescent and two full moons connected by three lines can, viewed the right way up, resemble a chair or a cradle. Turned upside down, they will recall for someone expert in deciphering these symbols, a stylized rendering of two bodies joined in copulation. In fact, it is the image of procreation. But the sign of the bull is that of the month of May, the month

September 17th

December 28th

June 17th



April 15th

Aiques Mortes

May 22nd

Saintes Maries de la Mer

Figure 20. Dates

of pilgrimage. There are clear links between this sign and the sacrificial bull altar in the crypt of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, on which—even as late as 1912—old sorcerers lay down in turns in the position of the fetus in its mother's womb.

Since 1822, when the Paris watchmaker Ricasseo invented the chronograph, the Gypsy sorcerers have drawn inspiration from this instrument to communicate the dates of their secret meetings (fig. 20). For this, one had to be able to tell the hour, for the signs have a direct relation to the hands of the chronograph. It is the position of the hands that indicates the date. The hour hand remains always at twelve o'clock and gives the direction of the reading. The minute hand represents the months: 12:05 is January; 12:10, February; 12:15, March; and so on up to 12:40 for October, 12:50 for November, and then again 12:00 for December. The fast-moving hand that marks the seconds represents the days; a minute on the dial corresponds to twenty-four hours.

As one would expect, the dating is only approximate, with a few days' leeway on either side.

On September 19, 1946, I sent Hartiss a postcard to await his arrival at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. It contained the sign shown in Figure 21.

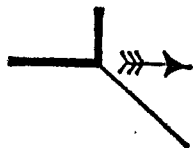


Figure 21. Example of date code

When he received it, he read: "A son was born on the eighteenth (or nineteenth or twentieth) of September." If it had been a daughter, I would have replaced the arrow with a target.

There is still another way the Gypsies have for in-

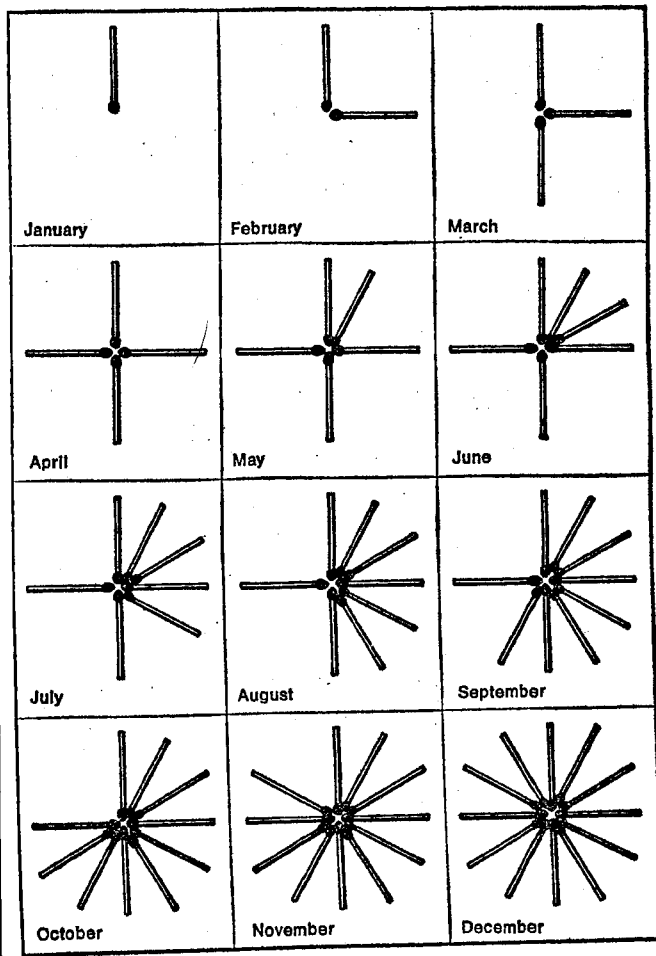


Figure 22. The months

After photo by R. Doisneau

dicating the month (fig. 22). One hand points to twelve to indicate January. The sign for February is two hands forming a right angle with the first hand still pointing to twelve. The month of March is three hands, the first two in the position already indicated and the third pointing to the figure six. April is four hands, the fourth pointing to the figure nine—in fact, a cross. One adds a hand for each month that follows, moving clockwise until December is a star with twelve points.

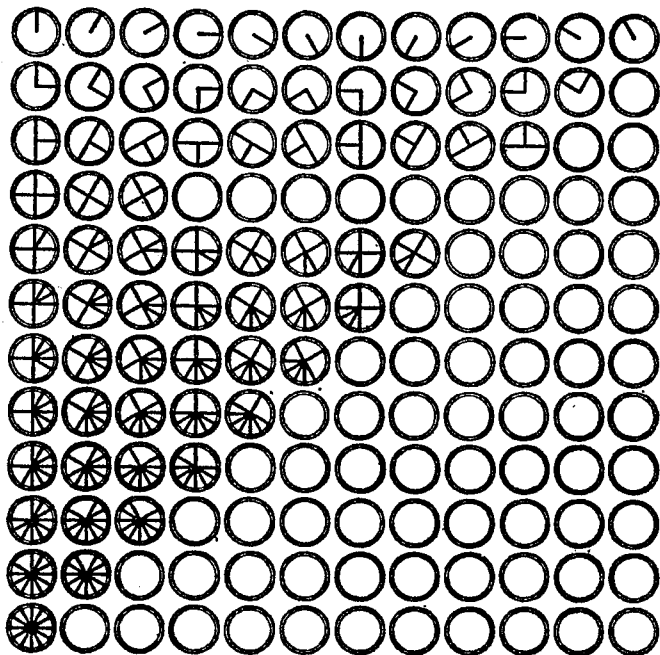


Figure 23. Hourglass calendar

After photo by M. Esnault

To ensure that the police or other gorgios didn't break the code, Hartiss devised an ingenious system to put them off the scent. His calendar comprised 144 dials in a twelve-by-twelve square (fig. 23). Accord-

ing to Hartiss, there are twelve different ways of indicating the month of January, in that there are twelve hour figures on the dial. Placing these twelve positions one on top of the other, one has the sign of the month of December, the close of the annual cycle. There are eleven different ways of indicating the month of February; superimposing the eleven dials, the December digit is reached once again. On the same principle there are ten positions for the month of March, eight for May, seven for June, six for July, five for August, four for September, three for October, two for November, and finally only one for December.

The month of April is an exception, because it can only be shown in three ways. It is the fourth month of the year, and it closes the first three-month quarter of the year. As we have seen before, it is shown as a cross. But if one superimposes three crosses with the vertical lines placed at twelve o'clock and six o'clock, at one and at seven, and at two and eight, the result is a complete annual cycle. So the month of April is called the "white month," because only three of the dials are used; it is also the "month of the wheel" (the hands are reminiscent of the spokes of a wheel); it is also the month of preparation for the May festivities, the month of the journey to Sainte-Marie-de-la-Mer. The blank dials represent either "dead time"—that is, the past—or, if one turns the illustration like an hourglass, the next year.

After carefully studying the calendar of Hartiss, I discovered by degrees several geometrical constructions whose symbolism is known to certain secret societies—for instance, the Freemasons. But the personal talisman which Pablo and Hartiss had urged me to devise had to find its inspiration in this source material. Three geometrical outlines impressed themselves on me as the origin of my ring. As a starting point, there was the triangle, representing the annual cycle in Hartiss's calendar and also the three elements: air, water, and fire—or, by analogy, wind, rain, and sun. The number three also symbolizes the

body that decays, the soul that has eternal life, and the tenuous element that binds the two together. Finally, the triangle is the sign and promise of a tribe; the triangle is the father, mother, and child.

Inside this triangle I placed a twelve-pointed star, representing the twelve months of the year. From the middle of this star emerged a cabochon stone, whose circular shape brings to mind the eternal return of the seasons. The shape of the stone—I chose a black one—was determined for me by the outline of the star.

To the symbolism of each part of the talisman was now added the symbolism of the whole: born of time and life, the stone appeared as a seed, a promise, the symbol of the everlasting renewal of life.

So, taking a type of calendar as my point of departure, I created a jewel. This procedure is well-known to the Gypsies. Even in its most workaday manifestations, their life is a fabric woven of beliefs and images, allegories and symbols. Every object, every article of clothing, every animal, every place, every journey is open to a more or less abstruse interpretation. This can have either a general or a personal symbolic meaning.

It is up to each individual to understand, to interpret the result according to his own intuition and experience; for the *kako* only teaches by allusions, not by finished examples. Each Gypsy keeps his interpretation to himself. Sometimes, as we have seen, he must give it concrete shape in the form of an object—a talisman, for instance. As the jewel has no tongue, the secret is not betrayed. And if certain aspects of the life of Gypsies are kept secret, it is because the nomads are aware of mysterious correlations on the far side of accessible reality. And they know that silence is a way of respecting what transcends their lives.

TWENTY-TWO

ROAD SIGNS

There is no universal language, and each country has its own tongue, grammar, and sometimes alphabet. The Gypsies, who have no knowledge of writing, communicate with each other by means of signs which can serve either as a signpost or as a private message. Each clan has its own, and these vary again from tribe to tribe.

A distinction should be drawn between signs taken from nature, like the stripping of a tree's leaves or the placing of clods of earth on the ground, and those that are handwritten and form a hieroglyphic language. If the latter obey an established formula and are therefore easy to understand, those inscribed in nature are more difficult to interpret.

It is not enough to grasp their general meaning; one has to know how to discover them and interpret them correctly. Knowing how to read a clump of grass from its color is an art which is not acquired in a matter of days. One must begin by getting an eye for the half-hidden places in which signs of this type are concealed. For example, one must know the aging process of a plucked handful of corn placed at springtime behind a milestone. The withering of the stalks and the state of the earth attached to the roots indicate the time that has elapsed since the corn was laid there.

If you discover in a bush beside the roadside a strip of material tied to three branches to form a triangle, it means "Meet at the next crossroads." Four acacia

branches stripped of their leaves up to the tip mean "We shall stay four days at the place which you know" (plate 18).

But there are "leaf signs" which are more intimate and secret. Two plants tied together can be a declaration of love, or the announcement of an engagement (plate 17). This love knot in the form of an arch symbolizes mating. It is tied when dawn is rising and the sun causes the dewdrops to fall and revive nature. Joined like this, these two plants receive the heat of the sun, and in the evening the sap in their veins pulls them straight up one against the other like a couple at peace after making love.

These leaf signs date from the time before automobiles were invented. They can only be discovered by someone moving at the speed of a walking horse. Today the tribes of Meyer, Grenech, or Demestre only use "signs of the earth," easily visible at high speed. Occasionally I discover some of these on the roads of France. Three clumps of earth placed on the roadway mean, for example, that one should take the third road on the right. Plate 20 shows a sign I found this year at Bellegarde, on the road leading from Saint-Gilles to Monfrin. This sign is incontestably one left by a tribe of Circassian Manouches, because the earth used is "virgin"—that is to say, without grass growing on it. It is what we call an "instant" sign, one which should be read within twenty-four hours.

The space between the clumps of earth generally give the identity of the tribe which has placed them there. The clumps I used when with the Meyer tribe were placed like this: XX X. Those of the Amedee tribe, on the other hand, are placed like this: X XX. Once, in company with Paul Meyer, I experienced the real excitement of the chase. This was at Arpajon, a small town near Paris, shortly after the war. Paul, who worked with me for the Bouglione Circus, had not seen his people for five years. We were bicycling along an almost deserted road which has since become a motorway.

"Look, look!" shouted Paul suddenly. "We've found them! Look, in heaven's name, look!"

At the start of the bridge there was a clump of grass and earth newly torn away from the bank. In the middle of it was a piece of wood notched with a knife. The turf trembled in Paul's hands.

"I can't count," he stammered. "Tell me how many notches you see."

"Eleven," I said.

"Can't be true. You've made a mistake. There are nine."

I counted the white scratches in the bark of the wood and repeated: "Believe me, old friend, there are eleven."

One hour and a half later, around the campfire of the tribe, Paul grasped the hand of a brother-in-law he had never seen before, and he gazed at his sister suckling a little girl with curly black hair.

But let us go back to the signs, and let me tell you this story, which is a true one. It happened to me in my childhood village long after I had left it.

When the old Gypsy Grinna saw that the acacias surrounding the garbage dump were beginning to flower, she persuaded her husband, who was nicknamed Serpette (which means "billhook"), to strike camp. Serpette took a lot of persuading. He said the reeds were good for making baskets and that there was still quite enough time for them to make their way to the village of Saint-Eliph.

But the old woman held her own, and when I arrived at the camping ground there was nothing to be seen but the black embers of their fire. I climbed down the slope that led to the river, took off my shoes, and went out on the pebbles by the river's edge. Serpette had left me a message: a little circle surmounted by a cross. I recognized that sign. It meant "Saint Eliph." Each town has its sign. When he visited Chartres, Serpette always drew a triangle with three circles divided by a horizontal line. These signs only

covered a single department—the Eure-et-Loir. Once the border of this department was crossed, Serpette drew the sign that means “No fixed direction” (see fig. 24).

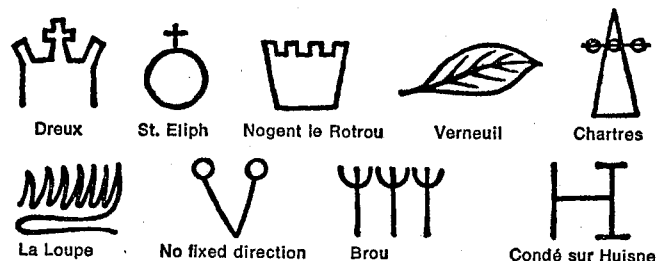


Figure 24. Hieroglyph for towns

Old Serpette knew that his gorgio friend was looking for him, and if the junction could not be reached there was no alternative but to fall back on a postcard. When a friendly village allowed Serpette to keep to the same campsite for ten days, he sent me one of his supply of postcards which was already addressed in my name. Before mailing the card, he went to the end of the village and faithfully copied on the blank side of it the name on the signpost. Three days later I was there.

One day I received a card which read “Camping Forbidden for Travelers.” Serpette had taught his grandson the art of copying signs he could not understand, and the child had faithfully copied the wrong sign, which he thought was the name of the village! Happily, I reached the meeting place that same day, having decided to trust the postmark.

But to go back to our story. I left for Saint-Eliph. I arrived in the middle of an abandoned farmyard at the same time as Cyril, the brother of Serpette. Bicycling as hard as I could, I managed to catch up with him as he turned into the cart track which led down to the marshes.

Night was falling, and the reeds around the pond swayed in light ripples under the wind. The campfire shone against the wall of a roofless grange, casting trembling shadows around it.

Serpette, his wife, Grinna, their friends, and a noisy troupe of children were awaiting the return of Sergio, who was out fishing for the following day's meal. The next day was a feast day. The acacias were in flower, and there were plenty of fish.

My friend Serpette used charcoal and chalk for his messages. The old Kaldéras tribes at the end of the last century cast theirs in tin and buried them at the foot of trees. The Kaldéras for whom the message was intended melted down the tablet bearing the hieroglyphs, thus destroying the secret outlines.

The tin plaque in Plate 19 is not authentic, because half a century has passed since this form of communication was used. I made the plaque myself, using the same procedure. To decipher this rectangular message, one must first place it in front of a mirror, just as my traveling brothers must have done. This procedure has also a symbolic meaning, for the mirror is, according to the Gypsies, “the silver moon, which is the reflection of the golden sun”; it reflects the light of knowledge. Read correctly, this hieroglyphic communication means “I shall be at Paris on March 18 at the Pont-Neuf over the Seine.” The first sign indicates the time of the rendezvous: March 18. The second sign specifies the place.



Figure 25. The Pont-Neuf

Figure 25 represents the Pont-Neuf, where Jacques de Molay, the grand master of the Templars, was

burned—as it happened on March 18. It is the image of an execution pyre in flames.

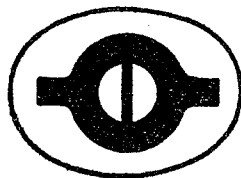


Figure 26. Paris

The third sign is the hieroglyph of Paris (fig. 26). Not the Paris of the Eiffel Tower or the Arc de Triomphe, but of the Ile de la Cité in the middle of the Seine—the Paris of the end of the Middle Ages, when the Gypsies entered France.

As for a star with five points inscribed in a leaf, it symbolizes the five senses, the faculty of “seeing” (mentally projecting the star onto a face) and the power of the magnetist, which is also represented by a five-pointed star. The whole message is a signature. It is, more precisely, the seal of a healer of burns, and the message is an invitation to the meeting of the Fire Masters at the Pont-Neuf on the anniversary of the ordeal that Philippe le Bel inflicted on the Templars.

Certain signs have, therefore, a symbolic meaning over and above their immediate content. Some time

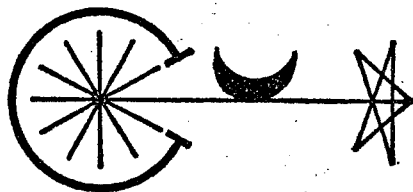


Figure 27. Gypsy symbol

ago I found a typical example of Gypsy symbolism (fig. 27). It was first engraved on a piece from a wine jar, then on the leather taken from the skin of a bull killed in the arena. These two objects were then placed in the tomb of the Marquis de Baroncelli by one of the descendants of the chief of the Zoraya Gypsy tribe. This sign symbolizes “life” in the view of a Traveler. The horizontal line probably refers to the Route de la Plata, or Silver Way. This is the coastline between Spain and Italy (*plata* means silver in Spanish, and its symbol is the moon). The incomplete circle whose opening points in the direction of the journey, is both the symbol for a horse (one finds this kind of sign on horseshoes, as we shall see later) and also the caravan (twelve spokes of the wheel). The five-pointed star drawn with a single uninterrupted line corresponds, probably, to knowledge, and perhaps also to destiny.

The various signs found inscribed on doors or milestones tell the Gypsy about the dangers of the particular conditions he is about to find in a given place. In 1956 I discovered, together with the writer Robert Giraud and the *Paris-Match* photographer Georges Dudognon, the “signs of death” on two wooden panels in front of the former dwelling of the Protestant leader of the Kaldéras of Montreuil, Matheo Maximoff. Today Maximoff has a wooden door in place of a canvas curtain, and a doorbell and a telephone like the gorgios. But sixteen years ago a gutter ran through his hut, and certain winding streets of his village of Montreuil had warning signs carved on old planks and could only be entered under the threat of reprisals.

The sign of the danger of death with the Yénisch clan I encountered was an eccentric circle. It expresses an anomaly in life, in work—an insecurity. On the other hand, this same sign is employed by the Kaldéras jewelers as the hieroglyph for a cat. On a magic ring, it is shown as an oval surface in

gold serving as the setting for a blue stone placed off center but in line with the finger of the wearer.

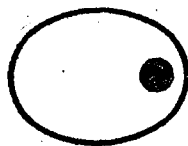


Figure 28. Danger (Yénisch)

Danger for the Circassian Manouche is easier to interpret. A triangle open on one side and pierced by an arrow was the sign warning onlookers away from the cages of the wild animals.

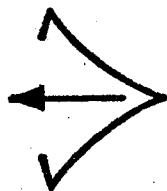


Figure 29. Danger (Manouche)

It was thirty years ago that I saw another enigmatic sign of the Kaldéras for the first time. It was traced on a plank which was nailed to a tree, and it was moved sometimes several times during the day. It was for me a mystery until last year, when I saw it again on the facet of a ring worn by a gnarled, dried-up little man. This sign is a schematic rendering of a mouth: two lips blowing. Children who saw it had to get out of the way. In the last century, the Kaldéras tinsmiths indicated in this way the direction of the wind which carried harmful fumes of the acids used in the metalworking.

The importance of horses to the Travelers is well-known. In the past the draft horse which drew the caravan was also a "medium" capable not only of

leading its master where it wished, but also of showing off to ensure its food and that of its master. The

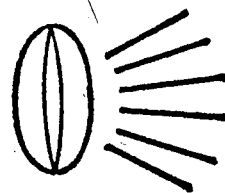


Figure 30. Danger (Kaldéras)

small circuses frequently exchanged their horses to diversify their programs and to return to the same areas with different acts. The Circassian Manouches established a system of seven secret signs which indicated the character and qualities of a horse. This equine "visiting card," only comprehensible to the Manouches, was traced in chalk either on the inside of horseshoes, or on the harness, or on the paving stones during public sales. It was my Gypsy brother "Marquis," a horse trainer with Bouglione, who gave me this code. For instance, the "sign of tranquillity," a horseshoe cut by three lines, indicated that one was in the presence of a horse that was quiet and easy

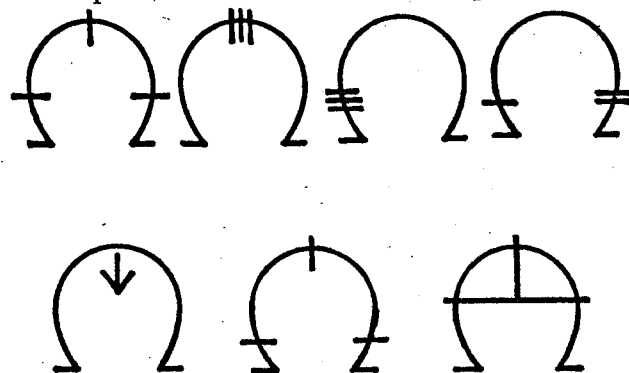


Figure 31 Horse signs (left to right, top): Tranquil, Lashes out, Uneven, Holds back; (bottom) Turbulent, Leader, Pack horse

to control. Figure 31 shows the seven signs and their meanings.

Sometimes horses were employed to transmit secret messages, artfully hidden under their shoes. This system of communication was above all used at the end of the last century by the horse-dealing Gypsies who passed from France into Spain and back. The horseshoes are always fixed by five, seven, or nine nails. The number of nails must be uneven. One always finds an extra nail on the side of the shoe where there is more weight. Gypsy horses therefore have either two plus three nails or four plus five nails, but most often three plus four nails. This is because the number seven plays a primary role in the symbolism of the Travelers. On a deeper level, this figure is that of balance and harmony, and one can imagine the relationship it could have with the correct nailing of horseshoes. The secret message which I referred to previously, the code of which I do not know, consisted of a small circle with an opening rather like the letter C. It was branded into the horn with a notched iron tube placed in the fire until it was red-hot. The direction in which the opening is pointing enables one to decode the message. The mark was branded on the side where there were only three nails, in the axis joining the seventh nail and the center of the horseshoe.

I discovered with astonishment this horseshoe with its seven nails on the floral decoration of a funeral

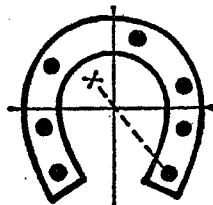


Figure 32. Horseshoe

hearse, that of the great Circassian Alexandre Bouglione. This seemed to prove that the signs I have described correspond both to a surface reality and to a deeper symbolism.

VI

Laws and Beliefs

TWENTY-THREE

THE WALKING DEAD

The traveling people are on the whole courageous and proud, but the very word *mulo* is enough to fill them with a fear close to panic. The *mulo* lives in cemeteries. It is a living corpse, a revenant, a zombie, something like the vampire or incubus of medieval legends. In the daytime it lives underground, and at noon it turns in its grave. But when night falls, it haunts graveyards and their neighborhoods in search of a victim. Around the campfire the terrified Travelers sometimes tell each other stories about the sinister adventures of one of their ancestors.

"Woe to the man who sees the *mulo* return to its grave at cockcrow," they say. "He will die a violent death like the *mulo*. And he will be accursed and become a *mulo* himself.

"The *mulo* is small and ugly. And if he makes love to your wife, your son will be the child of a *mulo*. His flesh will be cold, his eyes gray. But no one will know his real origin, for the *mulo* will only take your wife while she sleeps. And the child will call you Father."

This belief—or rather this superstition—is held by all the Gypsies. The two stories which follow will show how deeply rooted the tradition is.

One evening I was called to the camp of the tribal chief Potro. After a long silence Potro started to question me.

"Would you go one night at full moon to a graveyard and stay there until cockcrow?"

"Why do you ask me that?"

"To raise the question of fear. Would you be afraid?"

"No."

"Liar!"

"Why is it you want me to admit fear? I have often walked at night in a cemetery. And in the country I know of graveyards that are meeting places for lovers."

The leader of the tribe gazed at me angrily. "The gorgios have no sense of decorum. Pigs, all of them! Never would a girl of our tribe so much as touch the wall of a cemetery—even at midday."

In the firelight the reflection of the flames danced in the faces around me. The hand of Hartiss tightened on my shoulder, and his quiet voice cut across the tumult of excited voices. "Steady now, Potro. This lad has come to bring peace to your daughter. And what do you do? You insult him, call him a liar. No man of your tribe wants to pass the night in the graveyard, and here he comes from far off to help you, not even knowing what you want of him."

"To call someone a liar is not an insult, Hartiss," said Potro, rising from the packing case he was using as a chair. Behind him, faces gazed at me strangely with an emotion akin to fear. For them I was the foreigner who had traveled two hundred miles to spend the night in the graveyard where Mario, the fiancé of Rupiche, had for two years now been sleeping his eternal sleep. For them Mario had become a *mulo*. And the only way of lifting the curse from one of the living dead was—according to Gypsy lore—to prevent him from leaving his grave at nightfall. To achieve this, a living man must spend the whole night stretched on the *mulo's* grave. Up to now there had been no volunteers for this vigil, and the *mulo* continued to haunt the tribe.

An old woman on my left filled a pipe, lit it with

a brand from the fire, and handed it to me. A sudden pressure from Hartiss's thumb in my back made me stretch out my hand. I took several puffs of the acrid smoke of the vile-tasting tobacco and handed the pipe back.

Potro sat down in front of me and asked, "Where have you learned the customs of my tribe?"

The old woman murmured, "He is the first gorgio who has taken my pipe."

"He 'knows'—that is all there is to be said," declared Hartiss.

"I think the fellow knows very little," answered Potro, shaking his head. "Otherwise he would not be here with us now. And perhaps he is making fun of us. Perhaps he wants to ridicule us later behind our backs."

The thumb of my companion pressing into my shoulder blade became almost painful. Beside me the old woman drew on her pipe with short puffs that released a cloud of choking smoke. In front of me Potro's broad shoulders were outlined against the tattered canvas tent. His dark, bearded face fixed me with a gaze of guarded mistrust.

The pressure in my back urged me to speak. "In fact I know very little."

"Then why have you come?"

"Your friend came to me and said, 'One of my brothers has need of you. You alone can do something for him, because there are things forbidden to members of the tribe.'"

"And so?"

"And so I came."

"Has he explained to you what has to be done?"

"Yes," I said. "I must keep watch on a grave from sunset to cockcrow."

"And you came."

"Well, here I am, as you can see."

The old woman broke in. "He came because he does not really know what it means, Potro. Otherwise he would never have traveled so far."

"He knows," said Hartiss calmly. "But the beliefs of your tribe are not those of his."

The old woman was unconvinced. "How can a man who does not honor the Great God and Saint Peter and Saint Sara of the Saintes-Maries do anything to a zombie?"

"There are men who know nothing of your medicine, yet who come to us when they are sick," said Hartiss. "And you send your children to their doctor when your medicine can do nothing further."

"You speak wisely," said Potro. "And the gorgio shall be the brother of my sons if he can save the sleep of my Rupiche."

"He'll do it, Potro," said Hartiss. "Of that I can assure you."

Behind me someone walked toward the circle of firelight and asked that his opinion be heard. I turned and saw an old man of remarkable liveliness. He could hardly have been more than five feet tall. He wore on his head a black scarf with white dots tied pirate-fashion. His feet were bare, and he wore a faded old military jacket made for a larger man. Under the mop of gray hair that half covered his forehead his eyes were black and piercing. He had an air of youth, and yet was eighty-four years old.

The old man was called Minito. He touched the arm of the old woman lightly as he passed and advanced toward Potro, who gave up his place to him. Minito looked at me closely. Then he turned back toward the leader and said, "Fear only exists where there is knowledge, and this young man knows nothing. The ignorant are never afraid. Children are ignorant of fire and water, which is why they play with both. Some die, others are unharmed. Let this unknowing one go to the zombi."

"I am not ignorant of the things you know, father," I answered. "But I am not afraid of them."

"Then go, my son."

I went.

One hour later in the little cemetery a dreadful

fear fell upon me. But I fought it off until I heard the cocks crow and the dewdrops glittered on the tips of the tall grass.

In the eyes of the tribe I had vanquished the *mulo*. As far as I was concerned, I had triumphed over fear. I only learned later that the herb wine which my Gypsy hosts had given me before I started my vigil was concocted to fill my heart with fear.

Potro told me before Hartiss and I left the tribe, "Only the wiseman or the idiot can conquer the cold that rises from the stomach and transform it into a sun."

The *mulo* is for my young friend Pedro Zanco the greatest fear of all. Pedro is seven, and at eleven o'clock each night he leaves Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer on foot to return to his parents' caravan parked on a stretch of wasteland far from the town. Pedro is seven years old, yet Pedro is a man.

Taking his guitar from one café to another, Pedro sings for a living. He makes enough to feed himself and his brothers and sisters as well. His mother keeps house while his father repairs cars. There are nine of them altogether packed into eight square yards of caravan.

While the sun shines Pedro is happy. But no sooner has night fallen and the lights gone out in the cafés where he sings, than fear of the *mulos* fills the heart of this seven-year-old man who earns enough to feed his brothers and sisters, and he becomes a child again.

He had just come to see me with his guitar on his shoulder.

"I'm frightened," he said.

"Of what?"

Pedro didn't answer. I understood his silence. One only talks of *mulos* in the daytime. At night one thinks of them, one waits for them, one watches and shivers. Once installed in the back seat of the car, Pedro was no longer afraid. The headlights swept across a desolate landscape. How bleak it was, the Gypsy camp

at Saintes-Maries after nightfall! The caravans were spread out across rutted ground patched with jagged outcrops of concrete. As the car approached, the caravan lights went out. There was fear behind the small rectangular windows. All the cars were in the camp—so who was this stranger and what did he want? Could it be the gendarmes?

"Is it far, Zanco?" I asked.

"No, it's over there at the end."

The dogs tethered under the cars barked as we passed.

"Here we are," said Pedro, his small hand striking a random chord as he hitched up his guitar. The women were on the threshold of the caravan. Pedro gave me his hand. He was no longer frightened of *mulos*. It was a spanking he now feared.

"Do you think they'll punish me?" he asked.

"No, because I'm here."

When we reached the caravan steps, I said to his mother, "Your son was frightened, my sister. So I drove him home."

"Thank you, my brother."

No further words were needed. For these people I know so well, only the gesture counts. That night little Zanco did not tremble walking barefoot through the dark, thinking of all the *mulos* in their new shoes behind the cemetery wall—the *mulos* waiting for the church clock to strike midnight, when they would emerge to torment the Gypsies.

It is not only children who believe in *mulos*. In the times of the horse-drawn caravans I remember certain stretches of road over which one traveled only at night. But if the road passed by a cemetery, the convoy halted before it was reached. I have seen stalwart acrobats, who risked their lives every evening under a circus tent, wait until sunrise before leaving their caravans.

The religions which provide a source of supply for the fetishism of the Gypsies have not destroyed these beliefs. Even the pilgrimage to Lourdes organized by

the Catholics has become tied in with some old ancestral practices.

Death itself has two aspects for the Gypsies. According to the degree of knowledge with which it is considered, the attitude ranges all the way from despair to serenity. The ordinary member of the tribe does not have the same reaction as its leader. The leader must give an appearance of greater despair.

Hartiss told me, "You must sometimes pretend to feel things if you want your brothers to reassure themselves at the source of your emotion. And they can do so even if the emotion is simulated. By doing this you will find serenity all the more easily. And a leader must be serene to be just."

For the ordinary member of the tribe, death is fear. For the *kako*, it is life. The former clings to old legends about *mulos*, of vampires reentering their tombs at dawn after having tormented the living. These harassments are sometimes sexual. It is the mother of the family who on the anniversary of the death of a former suitor feels violated in her sleep.

The auto-suggestion is sometimes so strong that it takes on the appearance of a bewitchment with all the side effects that are usually found in such cases. In 1895, the tribe of Hartiss was passing through Verona, where it joined another tribe journeying to Spain on the traditional Route de la Plata along the Mediterranean coast. Pietro was thirteen at the time and was a member of the group of teenagers which posted sentries around the camp at night. They watched over the horses and kept guard against hostile bands of peasants who sometimes attacked the camps after dark.

One night a dreadful sound of howling awoke the sleeping camp. A young woman broke out of one of the caravans and ran wildly in a straight line. Overtaken and brought back to her caravan, she could only mutter incomprehensible words. It took two days for one of the women of the tribe to get to the bottom of the mystery. Roselia declared that her fiancé, who

had been dead for two years, had come back to claim her virginity. Dishonored, she could no longer marry the cousin to whom she had been promised by the family. From that moment on, the camp lived in a state of incessant fear, and grown men were entrusted with the guard duties.

Hartiss's education was at that time in the hands of Pietro Sintilla, an uncle on his mother's side who was a sorcerer and a *kako*. Despite his youth, Hartiss was allowed by his uncle to continue to take part in the night sentry duties on condition that he keep his watch from a safe vantage point beneath the four wheels of a caravan. But here the boy found he could learn a lot about the secret goings-on of the tribe by turning his eyes upward to the cracks in the floorboards. Moving from the shelter of one caravan to another, he became an authority on everyone's private life. When his uncle found out, instead of reprimanding him for his eavesdropping, he told him that the knowledge of such secrets must never be used except for a good cause. On no account should his face ever betray his knowledge of a secret discovered in this way.

It happened one night that young Hartiss was lying on some old sacking under his uncle's caravan when he heard his uncle rise from his bed and put on his clothes. The door creaked although Sintilla did his best to open it quietly. Then there was the noise of his feet on the wooden steps. Passing in front of the caravan, he leaned down over his nephew.

In Hartiss's own words, this was what happened next:

"I pretended to be asleep. When his back was turned, I opened my eyes and saw him walk over to the far side of the camp and enter the caravan of the woman who had cured Roselia of her fear. A few moments later, pressed up against the floorboards of that caravan, I overheard a strange conversation.

"If you give me one of your hairs, Rinna, I shall

tie one end of it to the gold ring in my ear,' my uncle said.

"And if I give you the hair will you take my body?" the woman asked.

"I will."

"Then take it, and you shall have the hair."

"That night I understood I had made my entry into a strange, forbidden world which frightened me. My uncle was a giant and seemed to have gone to work with a will, for the caravan heaved and rocked. Stealing away, I returned to my first vantage point. When my uncle returned to his caravan before dawn, I called out to him. He leaned over me, and I said, 'Have you still got the ring in your ear?'"

"He didn't answer immediately, but stooping down further, he laid himself alongside me.

"When you are a man, little one, I shall explain to you."

"But I am a man."

"No."

"But you yourself say I behave like a man."

"Of course you behave like one. But you don't yet act like one."

"What must one do to act like one?"

"Make love to a woman. And don't misunderstand me, I said to a woman—not to a girl."

"That night my uncle went to sleep beside me, and when it was light I saw his left ear was without its gold ring. We went together into the caravan. He closed the entrance, something he never did ordinarily. Then, going to the icon, he unhooked the frame and took a little gold rod from a secret hiding place. He looped this around the nail from a horseshoe, and I helped him to insert it in the hole in his ear. He now looked his usual self. Then, taking out his wallet of police identity papers, he slipped inside it a gold ring hung from the end of a hair of astonishing length and placed the whole package in the hiding place behind the icon.

"Days passed, and the caravans moved on through Spain.

"Then fear returned to the circle around the camp-fire. For the stomach of Roselia began to swell like that of the pregnant wives of the tribe. Some men gave up drinking wine, and others complained that their wives no longer acted like women.

"One evening the council of the tribe was called together. That night my uncle slept in the caravan of Roselia's father. The following day the whole tribe witnessed the start of the progressive shrinking of Roselia's stomach. In less than four days she had recovered her girlish waistline.

"It was then I understood that my uncle had used a sorcerer's powers to put an end to the apparent bewitchment of the *mulo*, which in fact was no more than a hysterical pregnancy.

"Then my uncle placed a hand on my head and said, '*Mulos* do not exist, but the Romanies have need of them. It is the same as with the gorgios and the stone saints with which they fill their churches. *Mulos* are not the same as statues, but they have a similar power. For there are images which have power. Before finding them at Lourdes and Rome, I saw them in India. But these *mulos* are heavy to carry around. That is why they do not make journeys and are enclosed in houses made of the same material as themselves. Our statues are in our heads, for the *mulos* are no more than the images of men who have existed.

"In India I knew men who could make statues speak. The gorgios do it the other way around. It is they who speak to the statues. When you are a real man you will understand what a *mulo* really is. What does it matter if a whole tribe believes in a dream, provided that its leader keeps hold of reality? Nothing else matters."

That was Hartiss's story, and in conclusion he said, "As you see, Pierre, my uncle did not believe in *mulos* in the same way as I do."

I asked him, "What do you mean when you say that after your death you will '*mulotize*'?"

Hartiss answered, "When I am dead, Pierre, I shall

come back as a 'presence' through the memory I shall leave with you. Only imbeciles try to materialize what has been—because what has been exists no longer, and attempts to resurrect it will produce no more than condensations of psychic residues which have nothing in common with the dead. Among the gorgios there are people capable of producing spiritual phenomena of this kind. But the *mulos* they may raise up in private séances are fakes. When an acrobat falls in the middle of his act, Pierre, another replaces him. The act is the same, but if the name is not changed on the program it's a fake. Dead flesh cannot return to life. Only the spirit remains, and if it shows signs of life it is because it has remained linked to life."

"Why are there so few of your people who understand what you are telling me?"

"Because with us it is as it is with you: man has his weaknesses. Certainly fear can alter his behavior. Fear of *mulos* is for us what fear of hell is with you. Believe me, Pierre, man is rarely good without cause. The priest will not say Mass for you if you have no money. The fortune-teller will not say her piece, either. The spirit of man is always linked to monstrous things.

"Doubtless that is why hell and *mulos* have a place in man's spirit. These beliefs are necessary to the equilibrium of human society. It would be wrong to expel them. That would only upset the balance. Of all the animals, man is the only one to master his bad instincts out of fear. This fear invented by the shepherds is the shield of the flock. The man who knows it lives in wisdom and is committed to silence. Believe me, Pierre, fear is the signpost to the path of virtue."

Only once in my life have I attended one of my brother Gypsies on the "last great journey." I knew that this man, once dead, would be placed naked on quicksands. He was a sorcerer. He knew how to make use of loopholes in our laws to disappear without leaving a trace.

"I am a W.F.A.," he told me one day. "That is a 'Without Fixed Abode.' Your brothers have never succeeded in shutting me up in a stone house. And they will never shut me in behind the stone walls of a cemetery."

The men around him on the day of his death looked at me in silence. In the road outside, the old van was waiting. Lying on the ground, the dying *kako* talked to us still. And in the narrow room, among men some of whom were strangers to me, I watched this battle with death. I knew that the *kako* wanted to die stretched out on the ground. He had often told me so. And I knew that the onset of evening would see him embarked on his last journey—calm, conscious, and lucid to the end.

"Death and birth are identical," he had told me once in the past. "Both are resurrection."

I have seen men die in my time, but I have never seen one make so lucid an exit. This man who hid his death throes in the heart of the town of Arles waited for nightfall to enter his night. Even today—even though I know he had special powers—I have difficulty grasping what he achieved that day. He died in the place he had chosen on a bed of reeds which had been trampled by the wild horses and bulls of the Camargue.

When he was dead, the *kakos* chanted their funeral dirge.

"I keep a hair of your head, my brother.
I shall tie three knots in it,
And I shall burn the ends.
There will remain only three knots,
Three suns,
Like my two warm hands
On your cold hand."

In the old days when death had taken one of the members of the tribe, they added another invocation.

"Your womb is not cold,
Sara,
It has sent out little suns.
Your life endures, Sara,
In the warmth of the suns
That your womb has placed on earth.
The earth opens its womb
To welcome you, Sara,
You were one of the little suns
The earth conceived.
All must return to the mother of all,
Sara."

It often happens that in the solitude of my work-room I think of that man. His face was so familiar to me that the earth which has swallowed him has left me his presence.

"I shall *mulotize* so that my heart can live beside yours," he told me the day he disappeared from me forever. And that is what he does every time my pen touches the paper on which I write. He lives again as if his smile and the bright glance of his eyes had risen from the quicksands of the Camargue. It is through his presence at my side that the *mulo* returns.

For Gypsies who are versed in the lore of their ancestors, the word *return*, or *mulotize*, does not always have the same significance. The extent to which the Gypsy experiences the *mulo* depends on his knowledge. If the wiseman is content with the spirit of memory, with the emotion which it arouses in him, without trying to give it material form, he also experiences the "presence" of the dead.

Little Pierre told me before he died, "I shall *mulotize*." And that is in fact what he does. Each time it happens it comes as a refreshment to me. When I think of my mother and those moments when she brought me the joy of existence, the emotion is different. Something is missing. It is as though my mother is no more to me than a happy memory, while Little Pierre has a different dimension—a presence.

Memory is only a mental image. A presence is so real it can almost be touched. One can dismiss a memory from the mind, but one must surrender to a presence.

"Everything can be explained," Hartiss used to say. And I often think of certain experiments he tried out with me, like "feeling a presence through a wall."

Four years ago one of my friends whom I had treated according to the law of the Gypsies was angry with me. It didn't worry me. I had grown used to that. Each time I have applied Romany law to the gorgios of my family, their reactions have caused me to regret it—for the law of the Gypsies is harder than that of the gorgios. With the Gypsies the sense of honor is all powerful, and there are no extenuating circumstances.

So this friend came to me one evening and said he never wanted to see me again. Certain things I did he found unacceptable. The scene passed without violence and ended in a handshake. My wife, however, continued to visit my friend's apartment, because his wife was warmhearted.

One evening I returned home, and not finding my wife, I went to my former friend's apartment. Hartiss was with me. I left him at the foot of the stairs and went up alone. My friend's wife and small son came to the door.

"No, she hasn't been here," the wife said. She looked rather strange, and I had the impression she was hiding something. Suddenly I felt a presence hidden behind the partition between her dining room and living room. It was a male presence, and it was sitting on a very low chair dressed in a dark blue suit with a white shirt and a tie. At the bottom of the stairs I told Hartiss of my odd sensation. We parted company, and I returned home.

A short while later I saw a man exactly resembling the one whose presence I had felt, walk out into the street. It was my former friend. I could hardly believe my eyes. A man who forbids the door of his house to

another man does not hide when the other comes to call. He chases him away.

Hartiss explained that I was thinking like a gorgio. What surprised him was that after applying to my friend the law of the Romanies I should be astonished by such behavior. For Hartiss everything had its logic. The presence felt through a wall was nothing to what I would feel the day he disappeared from this world. It may be that in the matter of becoming aware of presences one becomes so conditioned that even certain antagonisms have the power to trigger the same mechanism. It seems that this estranged friend of mine achieved that day a presence born of his resentment.

Anyway, the important thing is that what *mulotizing* meant to the *kakos* was to return not just in the memory but as a presence—immaterial, certainly, but nevertheless completely discernible, felt and real.

TWENTY-FOUR

CHARTRES AND THE GYPSIES

One day Hartiss and I ate our lunch together on a bench in the square behind Chartres Cathedral. This meal in the open air far from the enclosed atmosphere of restaurants led us to talk deeply in a way that is perhaps only possible when one has left the crowd behind.

When we had finished eating, Hartiss took his knife and traced a geometrical outline in the dust at his feet (fig. 33).

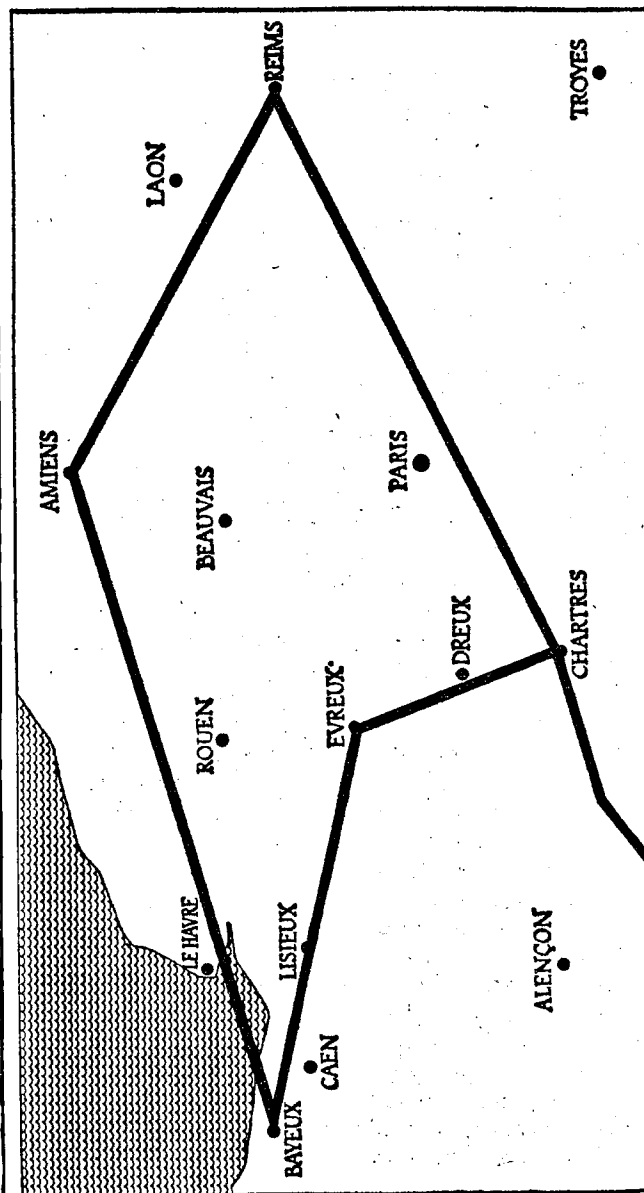


Figure 33. Map of cathedrals

"It's a sign I don't know," I said.

"It's not a sign," replied Hartiss. "It's something else. Think a little. Try to work it out."

I gazed at the unequal straight sides of the diagram, but could make no sense of it.

"It looks like a kite on a string," I said.

"You are getting close," my friend said. "It's certainly a shape that comes from the sky. In fact, it's inscribed in the stars. What you call a kite is the 'constellation of the Virgin.'"

Pointing to one of the angles of the figure, he said, "Here is the star Gamma, and Gamma is Chartres. There is Amiens, here is Bayeux—or, if you prefer, the stars Zeta and Epsilon. In the sky the ear of the cornsheaf of the Virgin is Rheims, right at the tip of the angle. Don't you find it strange that these cathedrals dedicated to the Virgin Mother are disposed on the ground in the same formation as the stars?"

"Doubtless a coincidence," I said.

"No, Pierre, it's not a coincidence. For in the great movement of creation nothing is left to chance. Man is only a minute part of the movement. We Gypsies are guided above all by instinct. And the men who built the cathedrals by inscribing on the face of France the outline of the constellation of the Virgin were probably influenced by the same great currents of the universe as we are, just as the planets are influenced by the movement of unknown suns."

He paused a moment and then added, "I am going to reveal to you one of the secrets of the cathedral. You must never speak of it—neither to your father nor to your sons—until twenty-five years have passed."

"Why?"

"Because twenty-five years from now the Travelers will have chosen another star."

He smiled as he closed his knife and said, "I don't ask that you give me your word of honor, because a father who demands his son's word insults him."

I was twenty-four years old at that time. Now twenty-five years have passed . . .

Chartres Cathedral is dead for the master sorcerers as a "place." But the place has been transported to another cathedral also dedicated to the Virgin Mother. That is why I can now reveal the Gypsies' secret.

"Under the hillock of Chartres passes the 'serpent of life,'" Little Pierre told me one day. Where the serpent of life passes there is no death. And Chartres is the only cathedral dedicated to the Virgin Mother which does not contain a single tomb.

The strange thing about what follows is that I was born at Chartres. As my parents were Catholics, I was baptized in the cathedral. But the stones of the cathedral were first revealed to me on the day I went with bare feet in search of the secret labyrinth. It was then I understood that this forest of stones was built in accordance with cosmic laws. Just as the sites of the cathedrals reflects the constellation of the Virgin, so the structure of Chartres is a symbolic image of the entire universe. In it the earth is the reflection of the heavens.

That day I, a gorgio, went with bare feet through the cathedral, following my barefoot master in search of the secret currents that cross the earth as the circulatory system does a man's body.

Under my feet the earth spoke to me through the paving stones. I thought of the millions of men who before me had placed their feet where I was now placing mine. Many times before I had walked over these stones in a mood of nostalgic solitude. Why had I never felt this unearthly sensation?

"It's odd," I said to Hartiss. "It's as if I had entered for the first time a house where I had always lived."

"That's what magic does for you," he said. "Look around at all these people wearing shoes who do not see. Only you and I have bare feet. We are the only seers in a crowd of blind men. The cathedral, my son, is above all a forest of stone, a forest that sings.

Men today have destroyed the breath of the forest that other men made for them.

"These men around us know no other way of glorifying God than to sit or kneel. But believe me, my son, the divine can only be reached standing up with bare feet planted on the ground. At this moment you are a living tree in the middle of a forest of stones constructed by forgotten men. The architects of the Middle Ages were great travelers like us Gypsies.

"Now try to find yourself a path across the ground on which we are standing. You will be fortunate indeed if you succeed in discovering the track which leads to the spring, for there is a spring. There's no forest without water, and the forest in which we are walking has its origin in the inner springs of the earth. It is as though we were walking on the body of our mother without trampling it, because it is of the same flesh as we are."

In those days Pietro was not yet the patriarch he has since become. He still had the wild strength about him that I had not altogether destroyed by teaching him to read. It was that day, I think, that he really brought home to me the power of instinctive man and gave me at the same time the best of himself.

This man whom I had known as an illiterate led me in the wake of the builders of cathedrals, the architects of the Middle Ages, the alchemists of stone. With Pietro at my side, I searched for my path. And having found it, I was led by him to the end of the journey.

We started out from the bazaar of the moneylenders of the temple—that spot inside an ancient chapel yielded by the diocese to postcard sellers. Looking at the ground and guided only by the soles of my feet, which received a sort of tactile message from the stones, I moved toward that place which Hartiss had shown me five years earlier—the pillar of the Gypsies.

"Everything is there," Hartiss said. "In the ground

and only in the ground. We are standing on the great serpent of life. The walls surrounding this place where one of the hearts of the earth is beating, were built by men of wisdom for an ignorant multitude, who instead of experiencing the power that lies in this place set out to destroy it.

"The route we have followed is only a path compared to the great pavement of the labyrinth."

"How can you know that?" I asked.

"Because my feet can feel it, and wisemen have told me it is so.* And then, believe me, Pierre, the reasons why we choose places like this have their roots far back in time. The secret is better kept in the hearts of wisemen than in the heart of books."

"But who, then, can do the same things we can?"

"Certain African sorcerers, the Tibetans, no doubt, and also men among you who have the magic powers but keep themselves hidden."

"What do you mean, 'keep themselves hidden'?"

"It's true. One day I came to this pillar. It was raining outside, and there was a man walking ahead of me who looked much like me. The cathedral steps were awash with rain. It was then I noticed that the shoes of this man left wet imprints on the paving stones inside the church. They were prints of bare feet. I immediately understood that here was a man who 'knew,' and that for convention's sake he had decided not to walk without shoes in front of his coreligionists."

"How did you know?"

"It was he who told me. The next day he came with bare feet to the rendezvous at the pillar which I had fixed with him. I waited while he did his walk.

* It would be interesting to find in the archives of Cardinal Tisserant the notes he took at the time when he referred in his correspondence to certain discoveries he had made with Pietro Hartiss. This would tend to prove that the Church does not reject out of hand certain facts touched upon in this chapter.

At his return the sweat was pouring down his face, but his smile was like a sun. You see, Pierre, this cathedral is to your country what one of the pyramids is to Egypt. In the Middle Ages your brothers used to call us Egyptians, and our people called themselves Princes of Little Egypt. I have brought you into contact with one of the navels of the earth. It was your ancestors who found the spot, but few of their descendants experience it as they did. Religion has swept the divine from the great book of stone."

Even if the crowd falls under the spell of the place, the pilgrim with bare feet alone rises above the common level. It is a rare privilege to feel the spiritual waves sweep across you. And what an awesome sensation it is to feel at one with mineral creation!

I have often wondered where deep inside me lies the switch that operates the circuit of perception, and why sometimes when I was alone I could not make it work. Very often I have walked with bare feet in search of the stone path and failed to find it. And at other times I only felt the faintest tremors of guidance, and an inexplicable weariness overcame me.

Then one day, a few years after Hartiss's first revelation, he revealed to me another secret embedded in the stones of the cathedral. On the previous day I had succeeded in stilling the pains of a small girl's appendicitis. Leaving Pietro's side, I went alone over the track which follows the labyrinth, and the worn paving stones spoke to me as if the path had been newly laid. In a state of wonderment I rejoined my friend.

"Here you are, a 'man' at last," he said. "We shall have to find you a son."

"But, Pietro, I already have one, you know him," I answered with a laugh.

"It is not of that son I am speaking, but of the other. There is one unknown to you now whom you will meet one day. He exists somewhere now, and when you meet him you will recognize him as I recognized you. You will teach him things I have taught

you, if you think he is worthy of it. For the master must judge the companion, and the companion the apprentice, and the apprentice must judge himself. That is the established order of the harmony of knowledge. If yesterday you had not removed pain from the body of that little girl, you would never have been able today to take with the soles of your feet what you have given with the palms of your hands. Now that you can cure, you have become the spring, the source. To recharge yourself you must take strength from other springs, so that you can be a source for the others; without that, you could not take your place in the universal movement.

"Come, I will show you. It is written in the stone of this cathedral."

We walked together in silence under the high vaults.

"Look," said Hartiss, pointing upward. I raised my eyes and saw the statues of two men standing side by side—one tall and the other smaller—sheltered behind a shield. At their feet a kind of snake held in its mouth a fir cone, or a many-faceted object. And below it was a fish.

Hartiss whispered, "The father and the son are on the edge of the pit where dwells the serpent of life, the one that has all knowledge. Look at the man with the seven glances [the fir cone] and the serpent of knowledge which spits the face of the son on man's earth."

Hartiss was referring to a very ancient Gypsy legend which tells of a child being swallowed by a snake as Jonah was by the whale. After forty days the reptile spewed out the child, who had become full of knowledge.

"The fish that swims in the stone river is a blind fish, for the river is subterranean," said Hartiss. "It is to this cathedral what the blood is to your body."

"How can you be sure of that, Pietro?" I broke in. "The men who carved those two figures knew nothing of the Gypsies."

"Perhaps, but they knew about the old wisdom, the

wisdom you have lost in the course of the centuries and for which you will yet find a use one day, because certain men of my race are passing it down from father to son, as I am doing with you. Look closely at these two statues. The brothers of your race who are wisemen say that they are linked to the stars by the astrological sign they represent: Gemini, the twins. Others say that they are two Templars returned from the Crusades. But I know that they are nothing else but the guardians of the secret which lies under their feet unbeknownst to anyone. The secrets of this cathedral are better locked up than if they were in a bank safe! The safe here is open to the sky; the combination opens the door to the light. It is silence. For what is more silent than a snake or a fish? These two animals are brothers. One of them cannot get on without the sun, the other without water. But these two apparently opposed elements are both indispensable to life—that life of which your brothers know nothing, Pierre, and of which one of the keys is hidden here in the dark vaulting.

"Now what you must do is find yourself a son—or better still, wait until he finds you. Then you will have a better understanding of the two smiles of these stone statues."

One day, outside Paris's Cirque d'Hiver, I met a boy who was playing on the pavement. His parents kept a café in the square close by and had been circus proprietors in their time. His name is Jack Doré, and for thirty years now he has been traveling the roads of France. Today he is the publicity manager of the Pinder-Jean Richard Circus.

And today he, like me, pursues the strange and nostalgic search for the traveling people. He sends me regularly news of his discoveries. He is to me what I am to Hartiss and what I was to Zolaroff and Little Pierre. We are of the same family, the same tribe; and to him I have become a "father" in the sense in which a man can find fulfillment outside the ties of his own blood in the spirit of one of his fellowmen.

TWENTY-FIVE

SARA THE KALI

Legend has it that not long after the death of Christ, the three Maries, Marie-Madeleine (Mary Magdalene), Marie-Jacobé (mother of Saint James the Less), and Marie-Salomé (mother of Saint John and of Saint James, the Apostle) were thrown into a boat by the Jews without oars or provisions (plate 21). They were accompanied by their servant, Sara, by Joseph of Aramathia, Lazarus, and Trophime. By a miracle the boat landed on a sandy beach near the mouth of the Petit-Rhône. Today Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer is a site of Catholic pilgrimage and a meeting place for Gypsies.

The devotions of the Travelers are addressed not to the three Maries, but to their servant, Sara. Sara the Egyptian, Sara the Kali, Sara the Black Virgin—the Gypsies have a variety of titles for her and venerate her as their patron saint.

Until 1912, her statue in the crypt of the church was forbidden ground for the gorgios. Gypsies would spend the night of May 24 in the crypt making offerings to the Black Virgin, lighting candles and festooning her pale blue robe with flowers, lace, jewels, and talismans.

In 1935, the gorgios took her out from the shadows to figure as a Gypsy dancer in their Christian ceremony, the Feast of Light. As an integral part of the procession she is of value to them. On the morning of May 24, six Gypsies in white tunics carry a model

of the sacred boat toward the sea. In the boat are the statues of the saints. Nomads and gorgios line the shore to watch the priest give a benediction from another boat. Tourists come from all over the world to see this ritual pilgrimage in which Sara takes part. But the Kali will have nothing to do with the gorgio's sun. Her lips seem to smile only when she is back in the shadows of the crypt. Let me tell you the story of my own pilgrimage.

It was only when I was inside the crypt itself that I understood what it was all about. I stopped at the bottom of the steps in front of the statue. To my right were hundreds of candles of all sizes, offerings from the poorest basket makers to the richest tribal chief. Light seemed to pour from their combined flames. Sara, in her Gypsy dancer's dress, smiled at me. I had come from Paris specially to make the short pilgrimage into the crypt (plates 22 and 23), and to be face to face with the Gypsies' patron saint.

I knew that as far as the Gypsies were concerned there was something more here than just a statue hidden away in the crypt of a church. It was the third time I had made the pilgrimage. I had still been a very young man when I last made the trip. Now I was twenty-eight years older and that much wiser in the ways of the nomads and the lore of the *kakos*. I had never been convinced that a statue could have superhuman powers, yet I wanted to understand the undoubted spell cast by this one.

The *kakos* had taught me that inanimate objects could only have life or power insofar as it was put into them by man. This is true of the violin and its bow. Without the musician who knows how to use them, they are useless objects. I know now that Sara of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer has the same relationship to the Gypsies as a violin in the hands of a violinist—she is an instrument.

The art is to know how to make her vibrate. To use the language of the sorcerers and *kakos*, she is "charged." Within her lies the accumulated energy of

generations of nomads. The principle is the same as that used in witchcraft. An effigy of the person the sorcerer wishes to harm is charged and then pierced with needles. These bizarre practices are as old as the world, but yet not recognized as scientifically possible. In the case of Sara, the beneficial emanations of goodwill fall out onto the collected assembly around the statue. Those who have the necessary sensibility can provoke them and then capture their force. Apart from the spiritual benefits, they also experience feelings of joy, well-being, and comfort.

All this is so far removed from the usual cult of the saints that there are even *kakos* who maintain that the legend of Sara, even if not completely invented, is only a pretext. As for the curé of the Saintes-Maries church, I am sure he has never penetrated the meaning of the plaster face of Sara the Black Virgin.

"Prayer is something which has its uses," Hartiss said to me one day. "It is the comfort of weak men. It can be like music for the soul, but it must pour straight out from the heart, not just be recited from memory.

"For that which comes from the heart or from the earth, both life sources, is stronger than anything that has been channeled by man. The day you go to the crypt at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, which is a man-made construction, shut your eyes in front of Sara, and you will know the source of the spring of life which flows over the Gypsy race."

If Sara is a spiritual aid for the Gypsy sorcerers, she is also an image of motherhood for the rest of the Travelers.

Little Pierre, a *kako* at Arles, said to me, "What you will find at Saintes is the womb of your mother: her smiles, her mouth, her eyes, and her hands. Walk barefoot toward Sara, holding two candles in your hands taken from those lit by your Gypsy brothers, walk forward with your eyes looking straight into hers. When your mouth is almost touching hers, you will

see her smile and hear her lips murmur your name. Shut your eyes, and then gradually reopen them. Her smile will be different."

If I did not have the power of the Look, Sara the Kali would just be a plaster effigy like any other.

The phenomena of visions and stigmata are attributed to hysteria. While the stigma can be perceived, the vision is only seen by the person experiencing it. As it cannot be touched or felt, the gorgios put it down to hallucination, unless it is of religious origin. Then it is believed to be a miracle. Religious history is full of tales of statues that cry or appear to have life. Hartiss told me right at the beginning of our long acquaintance, "Don't throw aside things that you personally do not believe, for there is a grain of truth in most of them. Strange as they are, extrasensory experiments are very real to those who experience them."

The writer or the musician has his existence in the judgment of others. But the person who knows how to give and get vibrations from a statue of wood, stone, or clay is doing it for himself alone. He is his own audience and critic.

By a muscular contraction of the eyes I was able to make Sara the Kali smile in her crypt. Her smile gave me the same feeling of calm and tranquillity that the nomads come to find.

The means they employ are different from those of the *kakos*; their approach is simpler because they are not there to find the reason behind the experience, but to feel the emotion of it.

The nomads can only realize their particular miracle at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, because it is there that the solé statue of Sara exists. There is not a copy in any other church in the world.

"To reproduce copies of the original Sara for other churches is impossible," Pitt Zolaroff told me, "because her smile is made up from the touch of thousands of Romanies who have placed their lips on hers. I have touched her lips with mine fifty times in fifty years. And if her cheeks seem warm with life, it is because

they have retained warmth from the fondling of babies' hands." Then he said, "Have you already touched Sara's lips?"

"Yes."

"Of all the gorgios I know, you are the only one who knows the rite. Why?"

"Because I know what it is that you seek."

"What do we seek?"

"The mother, the woman, the sister, the queen, the *Phuri Dai*, the source of all Romany blood."

He nodded his head and said, "You know the lesser secret. But for the other, the big one, you need to have more knowledge and much love. When you know the secret, you will never speak of it. For our only force, Pierre, lies in our silence."

"I don't write about everything I know, Solar."

"So, you do understand our silence, then. Our people are sometimes called liars. But often a lie protects a secret. A man who lies is never taken seriously, and that in itself is a strength."

I didn't see Solar last year. The big meeting place of the Romanies has become more and more deserted. Of all my friends among the Travelers that I met there in 1947, I only met one on my most recent visit.

"The Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer are dying," remarked Torino Zigler, the Manouche Gypsy whom I did meet there.

I say that they are already dead.

Back in 1947 when Sara the Kali was carried down to the sea by the Gypsies, she was followed by a band of Gypsy women whose long, flowing, multi-colored dresses made a cortege of living color. The barefoot children clinging to the hands of the women, or following along with the old folks, made a long, weaving line from the crypt to the sea.

In 1973, women in minidresses, high heels, or trousers followed the procession. They appeared to have forgotten all their ancestral taboos: "Your body shall only be uncovered in secret, for your legs

are like two roots which carry life." Fifty years ago those women would have been whipped and then sent away to live with a relative in distant parts. Today it is only the little girls who still make their skirts dance to the music of the guitars.

With very few exceptions, the Gypsies who trail behind the processions today have lost the spirit of the road. The motor trailer has killed their sense of tribal unity. I know many who have forgotten what their grandfathers have taught me. Some of the young Gypsies are indistinguishable from the hippies that flock to the scene, while the old people shake their heads over a time that seems lost forever.

Last year Sara was still wearing strands of horse-hair around her waist, and handkerchiefs spotted with *diklos* were lying in front of her, for there are still Gypsy girls who offer up their virginity to Sara the Kali. Panther claws set in gold were fixed into her diadem of false pearls. And then one day, I saw a *kako* impose silence and respect by sheer willpower. That morning the crypt was full of tourists—men and women in shorts, cameras slung over their shoulders, talking in loud voices as if they were in a fairground museum. Suddenly, I felt his presence. He was accompanied by an adolescent boy, probably his son.

Pushing his way through the throng, he stood before the statue. Masking it with his body, he turned around and looked at the gorgios. His face seemed to change, and in a moment I realized he was going to exercise his power of the Look. The group of tourists suddenly became silent. And then one by one they left the crypt and went up to the steps. Soon there were only the three of us left.

Almost without thinking, I went and stood beside him. He was looking fixedly at Sara's face. I felt him tremble. The boy stepped back a pace while the man stepped forward and kissed Sara on the mouth. Then he turned and looked inquiringly at me. I put a finger to my lips to make him understand that I had already been to the source. Then we made our way out of

the crypt through the church and the shuffling crowd of people and parted in silence. I saw him three times during that week, but we never spoke. There are silences that speak for themselves.

No, the magic of the Gypsies is not dead. Until the priests forbade it, the crypt was used by the master sorcerers as a place to sleep. Their sons return to drink at the fountainhead of their beliefs, but for how much longer?

TWENTY-SIX

THE ANCIENT RITES

There is a stone wedged into the nave of the church of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer called "the pillow of the two Maries." Legend has it that the stone was made shiny from the friction of the heads of Marie-Jacobé and Marie-Salomé. Right up until 1935 this stone was used in the preparation of philters. Scrapings were taken from it and crushed into powder, which was mixed into a potion against sterility. Gypsies regard sterility as a curse; certainly the sorcerers believe it to be one.

Woe to the woman
With an empty womb.
The rain that caresses
Her face
Will be her own tears.

There also exist many small stones of fertility of the same shape as the pillow of the two Maries. These

were given to young girls by the Gypsy sorcerers. Little Pierre explained to me the origin of these stones.

In the old days of the pilgrimage, the Romanies were their own masters in the crypt. Some of them came only once in ten years, for often they had a journey of six months there and back. As soon as they arrived they spent their first night in the crypt, for at that time the church was open to them day and night. Some of them, however, unable to find a place, slept on the ground in front of the church, resting their heads on stones thrown up from the beach by storms and tides. Thrown up with the stones there were often pieces of broken Roman jars. Tribal wisemen, telling their stories around the big campfires, maintained that these stones and broken remains dated from the time that Sara and the two Maries trod the beaches between Saintes-Maries and the Gulf of Beauduc. The Gypsies call this part of the coast "the mother's womb." Certainly the sea between the two points does have a shape rather like the curve of a pregnant woman. From there to finding stones that had a similar shape was an easy step for the sorcerers, who used them to pillow their heads. They were also used as part of ceremonial fertility rites.

The stone in Plate 24 is a marvelous example. Apart from the signs cut into the two surfaces, it has been sculptured naturally by the wash of the seas and the rub of the hands of time. Its shape is that of a pregnant woman about to give birth. The engraved signs on the two surfaces speak for themselves: the cross marked in the back curve is the mark of the woman (the vase or receptacle) giving birth to her child. She is protected by the mark of the serpent (wisdom) and the famous five-branched star, daughter of the sun. On the other side of the stone, the position of the child about to be born is clearer. The sign engraved to the right of the womb of the pregnant woman is the hieroglyph of Aigues-Mortes (an old medieval town near Saintes-Maries situated

on a marshy inlet known as the "dead waters"—hence the name Aigues-Mortes). In the carving at the top of the stone, at the height where the breasts would be, the mark for Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer is engraved. Sorcerers interpret the placing of these two signs as "You will conceive a son in Aigues and will bear him at Saintes-Maries."

I wonder what became of the young Romany girl who laid her head on that stone to sleep and dream of the son her Gypsy husband would perhaps give her on the ramparts of the Tour Constance. (The Tour Constance is a donjon surmounted by a tower which forms part of the ancient ramparts of Aigues-Mortes.)

This fertility stone is a vestige from the past, and one of the very few stones of this type still in existence. Since 1912, the date when the then curé of Saintes-Maries was first allowed to witness some of the old Gypsy rituals in the crypt, the sorcerers have taken off to another and more secret place. And the original village of Saintes-Maries has gradually been transformed from a place of pilgrimage to a tourist attraction.

In 1912, the old tribal chief Zaroya laid himself down for the last time on the sacrificial Mithraic altar of the crypt, just to the left of the statue of Sara. Then he went to sleep in the traditional position of a curled-up fetus. When he woke up, he made a prophecy. As fast as the Gypsies are chased away from the old sites that were reserved for them, so progressively will the village of Saintes-Maries become crushed out of existence by houses that will encircle it and strangers who will invade it.

In 1947, I was able to eat meat from a whole sheep roasted at the campfire of the tribal chiefs. Today an enormous concrete parking lot covers the spot. The Gypsies have also been chased away from another campsite which is now a municipal camping ground. Relegated to a camp near a sports ground, they are now only allowed to sleep eight days at Saintes-Maries at the time of the traditional yearly ceremonies.

Once these are over, the exodus begins. In less than a week they have to be out, pushed by gendarmes, along the roads to the stinking sites reserved for them near the rubbish dumps of the big towns and the industrial cities.

Today, apart from the pilgrimage of May 24 and 25, Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer is simply a hippy resort. Drugs have replaced the guitars. Girls with dead-looking eyes and sloppy, slack-mouthed boys have replaced the old families from Andalusia and Hungary who used to make their guitars sing and their violins cry. The village, bit by bit, has become encircled by horrible buildings. From behind their fenced-in enclosures on the outskirts of town, the Gypsies are powerless to stop the canker which is destroying the ancient site of their ancestors. Some of them can even see the day coming when they will be obliged to kidnap the statue of Sara to prevent her from being even more besmirched by contact with the gorgios than she has been already. When Saintes-Maries is completely deserted by the Gypsies, then the prophecy of old Zaroya will have come true.

In 1935, when the clergy took Sara out from her crypt and made her part of the procession, some of the Gypsy Fire Masters imposed on themselves the ordeal of the "burning dagger," a red-hot knife placed on a wrist vein, as a sign of mourning.

"The sun has burned through Sara's steady gaze," they said. "There are forces which die if they are brought out from the shadows into the light."

According to Little Pierre and Gunther Wolf, it was as a result of a special pact between the Marquis de Baroncelli, the then great protector of the Camargue, and Coucou Baptiste, a Provençal Gypsy king, that Sara was brought out from her crypt. So many Gypsies were coming to Saintes-Maries to see Sara that something of the sort was necessary, as there was no longer enough room for them in the crypt. The Marquis promised the Gypsies his protection and a month's residential permit with permission to cir-

culate throughout the area. In return, Coucou agreed to use his authority to help the Marquis make the necessary changes to the pilgrimage.

But for the Marquis' successors, the Gypsies are simply a tourist attraction. The municipality has covered most of the nomad camping sites with concrete. The Gypsies have permission to stay for a maximum of eight days, four days before and four days after the ceremony. After having to go through an inspection of their identity papers, they are made to park in a limited area, constantly patrolled by the police.

For the past twenty-five years I have watched the ceremonial of the passage of the saints gradually change for the worse. Official controls have tightened around the fortified church like a vise, and the whole ritual of the festival has been transformed. The old sorcerers were right in their lugubrious prophecies. Nowadays some of them carve their talismans on yellow sandstone collected from near Aigues-Mortes. Will this eventually replace the soft white stones of Saintes-Maries which served as pillows for the young Romany girls of the nineteenth century?

There are certain links between Saintes-Maries and the old port of Aigues-Mortes, which saw Saint Louis go off to the Crusades. The two towns have a common symbol. Is this an omen rather than pure chance? Perhaps the dying cult of Saintes-Maries will find a new home there?

One can't help thinking that transpositions of this sort do obey a kind of geographical rule. For the Gypsies the earth's soil has "lines of life" and "lines of death," as does the human body, and they are not prepared to make camp just anywhere. This has a direct link with the points I made in Chapter 21 about Chartres.

One should also remember the strange itineraries of the Tree Men at the spring equinox: the last steps of their journeys lead up to the coastline trod by the feet of Sara and the two saints. There are also

the pathways of the *kakos* of the Camargue (plate 25). Little Pierre traced them out for me one day on the back of a postal almanac. These wild, lonely paths, formerly animal tracks, all lead to secret clearings where certain Gypsies still gather for mysterious annual meetings.

Plate 26 shows Coucou Baptiste, the undisputed king of the Gypsies at that epoch, making the sign of the "placing of hands" on the Archbishop's crook. This is the sign that indicates that something has been concluded or come to an end. Apart from the smiling faces, the gesture is one of great gravity, and it is unlikely that among the crowd of Gypsies and tourists present there were more than a very few who realized its importance. Coucou undoubtedly made his gesture with intent, for its meaning is symbolic. The Archbishop is wearing his miter, but Coucou is bareheaded—not out of respect for ecclesiastical authority, but because for a Gypsy to bare his head means he is in direct contact with the sun. For an initiate, Coucou's gesture means, "The site is dead. Move it elsewhere." This picture was given to me by the widow of Georges, a photographer from Arles. She was also the mother-in-law of Coucou's daughter.

In fact, although it was glossed over at the time, the Gypsy chief had violated the laws of the Romanies by marrying his daughter to a gorgio. Out of friendship for the Marquis de Baroncelli, he fraternized with people who were not of his race and became a sort of renegade for his own people as I am for mine. This "King of the Gypsies" became, without realizing it, a cat's paw on the Camargue gorgios.

Both Coucou Baptiste and the Marquis de Baroncelli have taken with them to their graves the secrets of their friendship and verbal promises; there is nothing left of them.

The municipality even contemplates being able to get rid of the last remaining Gypsies who still make the pilgrimage. On August 13, 1972, the French radio broadcast a three-hour program on Saintes-

Maries-de-la-Mer. They found a way of not mentioning the word *Gypsy*. No allusion was made, not even the smallest mention of the Travelers who have made such an important contribution to the fame and prosperity of the place. So much for the gratitude of the gorgios!